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A SKILLED

WORKMAN



W. A. BODELL

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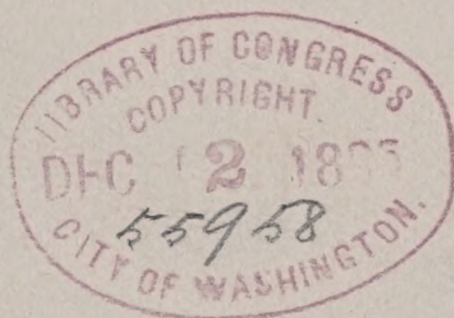
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

A SKILLED WORKMAN

✓
BY W. A. BODELL

Author of "The Spiritual Athlete"

"For we are workers together with God"



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INTRODUCTION.

I have read with deepest interest the proof pages of "A Skilled Workman," and if any word of mine can extend its influence or widen its distribution I shall be glad. There is not a dull page in the book as I have read it.

The Christian life is presented as it ever should be, in the most attractive form, and I hardly see how any young man can read the story without having a desire to reproduce the life of the leading character, who was indeed a skilled workman.

George Axtel was simply consistent. He did what he could; he did it with his whole heart; his sincerity was apparent and his whole bearing was that of a true-hearted, loyal follower of Jesus Christ.

Such a life always has power. It is not what we say, but what we are that tells. Any man can write a check, but only the man who has money in the bank can write one with any value.

Given a consistent Christian character, one that in every little thing magnifies the Risen Lord, and the result is power always.

INTRODUCTION.

There is nothing in this book that even savors of fanaticism; not a sentiment advanced is impractical. The scenes described may be repeated at any time and in any place.

There is no joy in this world like that which comes as a result of doing the will of God.

I commend the book to young people everywhere.

J. WILBUR CHAPMAN.

Albany, N. Y., October 16, 1895.

CHAPTER I.

On the banks of the Tippecanoe river, not far from where it pours its crystal waters into the Wabash, is a spot which for its beauty can not be surpassed. Had it not been for the curse of sin, an Eden more beautiful could scarcely be desired. The surface of the river looks as if it had been polished with diamonds. Its quietness was not disturbed, save by a fish now and again leaping up out of the water. The flowers were scattered along the banks as if carelessly dropped from heaven. The boughs of the trees are woven above you as if angels had taken the young twigs, when nature first put them forth, and intertwined and interlaced them at their will. The air seemed to be laden with life; the trees and flowers were loaded with beauty; the quiet river, leisurely flowing by, spoke of peace and comfort.

Here in eighteen hundred and ninety-three, in the month of August, seven young men from the city not many miles away, tented together for a fortnight in comfort, recreation, and pleasure. Here they spent their time in communing with nature, in hunting and fishing, and lounging about. Here they were free; the restraints of

home, the care of store and office, the noise of street and shop did not bother them. When the time for their return into the city, to again resume their work, had come, they were loth to go. This place, where they had spent so many pleasant hours together, had a peculiar fascination to them; they seemed to be under a spell, which they did not want to have broken.

The time for breaking camp had arrived. The night before they were leisurely lounging upon the bank of the river. The sun was fast sinking out of sight behind the woods back of them. The shadows had lengthened until only the cliffs across the river were tipped by the rays of the sun. The reflection of the trees along the river's bank, and the scattered clouds flying in the sky, were reflected in the water, revealing a picture never yet surpassed by any artist.

Nature seemed to have been hushed to deepen the parting meditations of the young men as they sadly thought of breaking camp on the morrow. There seemed to be a distressing stillness, as the boys talked of the good time they had. Nothing could be heard but the sound of the still breeze among the trees, the rustle of the corn across the river, the barking of a dog at a distant farmhouse, and the doleful roaring of a train in the distance, speeding its way northward; and their talk, broken every now and then by a merry

laugh of some of the fellows as it rang out among the trees and echoed across the river.

There had been a silence; neither of the boys had spoken for a minute: then said George Axtell, "Well, boys, if we live till next year, why not come back here for the summer?"

"If we live!" replied Emmett Windom. "Why, George, you do not expect to die, do you?"

"No, Emmett, but you can't tell. Life is a very uncertain thing. I am sure no one would be more sorry than I, if we would not all be here; but you can not tell."

"Say, boys, George is getting serious," said Emmett Windom, "and I would not be surprised if he would be converted before another year."

"That would spoil our encampment, wouldn't it?" said Frank Basil.

"I don't see why," replied Bert Moore.

"Because, if George ever gets converted, he will get converted all over; for whatever he does, he does with his whole heart; and I am afraid if he ever gets converted, he will not rest until he has us converted; and that would spoil the encampment," replied Frank Basil.

"Well, what about coming back next year for a few weeks," said Will Long impatiently, as if he were disgusted with the conversation in which they were engaging.

"Two weeks is not long enough," said Ralph Hill. "Why not make it a month?"

"That's better," replied the boys in unison.

"Well, now, it is understood that we will be back here next year; that is, if we live," said George Axtell, with a twinkle in his eye.

"We don't expect you if you are dead," sarcastically said Emmett Windom.

"Oh, well, now, quit your fooling, boys, and what about coming back here next year?" asked Ernest Moore.

"Why, we will be back, of course," replied several of the boys.

"That's settled now, is it?" asked Emmett Windom.

"Yes!" replied all the boys in unison again.

With this decision they arose to retire for the last night in the solitudes of the forest. As they bade each other good-night, George Axtell said: "Boys, if we want to get back to town to-morrow by noon, we must be up early in the morning."

"All right," replied the boys.

The next morning the boys were up early, and after breakfasting upon what they had left in the camp, they began to take down the tent and make preparations for leaving. The wagons which were to take them back to the city had come, and piling the tent and what they had left

rather unceremoniously in the wagons, they were soon on their way to town, where, on Monday, they were to be at work at their respective places, with the exception of Frank Basil, who was preparing to enter college in September.

For days and for weeks the boys when they met on the street and elsewhere would speak of their encampment, but on the eighth of September Frank was to leave for college. On that day when the train left, some of the boys were at the train to bid him good-bye, and as they did so, George Axtell said, "Frank, don't forget us, and your engagement next summer."

"I am sure I'll not do that," replied Frank, as he stepped on the moving train as it was pulling away from the depot, and was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

George Axtell's mother was a widow. George's father had left them quite an estate. George's mother worshipped him almost as an idol. There was nothing too good for George. His mother gave him everything that his heart could wish, and a good deal more than he ought to have had. He soon became to be a "spoiled boy," as we say. On account of his money and leisure, he began to associate with a class of young men which soon contaminated him. His mother realized it and did all in her power to keep him away from the bad influences of associates and of the street. She was an earnest, consecrated Christian woman. The early waywardness of George almost crushed her. She had faith in God, and believed that some time George would be saved; for it had been his father's prayers while he lived, and his assurance before he died, but she could not think of him wandering away from home and becoming a prodigal, both to her and to God, with all its sad consequences and experiences. To her there came this thought time and again, "I know he will be converted, but why not now, why not now? God can save

my son speedily." So she began to pray for faith, for his speedy conversion. Day after day, night after night she prayed; but there seemed to have been no concern whatever on the part of George concerning his soul's welfare. Had it not been for her faith in God, she would have ceased praying; but she faithfully kept on praying, claiming the promises of God.

It was in January. Meetings were going on at the Presbyterian Church. The Lord seemed to be there in power. There came upon the Christians a deep concern for the unsaved. Many were converted. George's mother had been attending the meetings every night, and became heavily burdened for the salvation of George. On Thursday night the pastor had given a very pointed talk on the wailing cry of David, "No man cared for my soul." He asked the parents whether that could be said by their children? Said he, "Father, mother, shall any of your children rise up at the judgment day and say, 'father and mother cared for my body, but they did not care for my soul. They cared for my temporal interests, but they did not care for my eternal welfare. They gave me a good education, but they cared not for my salvation.' Oh, parents," said he, "shall any of you hear that cry at last from the lips of your own children?"

These impressive questions went like swords

to the heart of George's mother. She decided that at the first possible opportunity she would talk to George about his soul. She began to think how she had frankly spoken to George about other things of far less importance than the salvation of his soul, and the neglect of this grave duty haunted her until she could not rest, until she had decided to speak to George about this supreme concern.

Friday night was a cold, stormy night. The wind was fiercely howling about the premises; the snow was drifting upon the streets. George's mother, on account of her delicate health, dared not risk going out that night. When George heard the wind howling without, and saw the fire glowing on the hearth, he was tempted to remain at home also. He picked up the evening paper and began to read. His mother was impressed that perhaps this was the time to speak to him about the salvation of his soul. She was just about to speak to him concerning this important matter, when she halted and began to doubt. She began to think, "Perhaps I had better not say anything to him now; I may offend him and drive him farther away than ever. Then I may make him shy so that I never will get an opportunity to speak to him." She had yielded to the temptation not to speak to him, but something kept saying: "Why not speak to him?"

Why not do it now? Will there ever be a better opportunity? Perhaps this is the only one I ever will have." She prayed earnestly, that the Lord might open the way for her to speak to him that night concerning his soul's eternal interest.

George had been reading attentively for some time, and seemed very much interested in what he was reading. His mother had said nothing to him, yet her heart was almost breaking to do so; but it seemed as if her lips were sealed and she could not speak. She noticed that George seemed much interested, and presently she said to him, "What are you reading, George?"

"I have been reading a very strange incident," replied George.

"What was it, my son?"

"A young man had decided to leave his home and go to the city. On his way he was overtaken by an old gentleman in a carriage, who asked him to come up and ride with him. The young man was glad for the opportunity, as it was quite a distance to the city. So he climbed up and thanked the man for his kindness. As they went along the kind old gentleman said to him, 'Well, my boy, where are you going?'

" 'I am going to the city, sir,' replied the boy.

" 'And what are you going to do in the city?'

" 'I want to become a clerk, sir.'

“ ‘ So ? and what then ? ’

“ ‘ Some time I hope to go into business for myself ? ’

“ ‘ Well, that’s good; but what then ? ’

“ ‘ Well, I intend to make all the money I can, and lay by for a rainy day. ’

“ The gentleman waited a moment and then said with much earnestness, ‘ But what then ? ’

“ ‘ Then, ’ said the young man, ‘ I propose to retire and enjoy life. ’

“ The old gentleman seemed to get more serious than ever, and in a solemn tone of voice asked again, ‘ But what then ? ’

“ ‘ Well, ’ replied the young man, ‘ I suppose by that time I must go the way of all flesh. ’

“ Tears were flowing down the old man’s cheeks as he said again, ‘ But what then ? ’

“ The young man seeing the object of the old man’s queer questions remained silent.

“ ‘ Oh, my boy, ’ said the kind old gentleman, “ ‘ It is appointed for men once to die, and after that the judgment. What then ? What then ? ’ ”

George looked up and saw that tears were standing in his mother’s eyes. “ What is the matter, mother ? ” asked he.

“ Oh, George, that is a very solemn incident to me. ”

“ Well, I wouldn’t cry over it, ” said George.

“ It is not on account of the story that I weep, but it is on your account. ”

“Why do you weep on my account?” asked George, looking at his mother in astonishment.

“I can not bear to think that you are unsaved, and are becoming harder in heart every day. The heaviest burden on my heart is the thought that you are not saved. I would be willing to make any sacrifice if you were only an earnest Christian.”

“Why, mother, what makes you talk like that? I do not see that you need to be so concerned about me. I do not know that I have done anything so awful. I do not feel that I am such a great sinner.”

“Oh, if you only felt that you were a great sinner, then I would not worry so; but it is your unconcern and indifference concerning your own salvation that distresses me. If you only felt that you were lost, then I would have some hope of your being saved. But you do not seem to care that you are lost.”

“Why, mother, what have I done that I should be lost?”

“You need not do anything to be lost, my son, you are lost already. ‘For he that believeth not on the Son of God is condemned already.’ And the Bible says, ‘how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ You have never accepted this salvation, so you must have neglected it. Whether you neglect, or whether you reject, the consequences will be the same.”

"I can not see it that way, mother."

"If you were sick, George, and the doctor would leave you a remedy that would cure you and you simply neglected to take it, would not the consequences be the same as if you refused to take it? You remember the wreck down at the depot a few years ago, don't you, when so many lives were lost? It was all on account of the switchman neglecting to close the switch; he did not mean to wreck that train, for he almost lost his mind on account of it, but he simply neglected to close the switch; but the consequences were the same as if he deliberately had thrown that switch and wrecked that train. If you go on as you have been doing, neglecting the salvation of your soul, the consequences will be the same as if you deliberately rejected it. Do you not think so, George?"

George remained silent for a moment in deep meditation, and then said, "Well, mother, there is no doubt but that I ought to become a Christian, but there is no use of your talking to me now."

"But, George, do you not expect some time to become a Christian?"

"Why, mother, what a foolish question that is to ask me. Do you think that I am so foolish as never to become a Christian?"

"No, George, I would hate to think that of

you; but you seem to be very indifferent about the matter, and you are becoming more so every day, and I fear you may trifle too long. How long do you intend to put it off?" asked his mother.

"I do not know," replied George.

"That's the trouble; that's the danger. Well, say you put it off ten years."

"Ten years!" exclaimed George in astonishment. "Do you think I am foolish enough to put it off ten years?"

"I hope not, but you seem to be so indifferent that I fear you will."

"But I hope I am not quite that indifferent, mother."

"Well, then, say you put it off five years."

"No! I can not put it off five years."

"Well, will you put it off two years?"

George hesitated as if he might put it off two years. Then he looked up at his mother in surprise and said, "Why, mother, do you want me to put it off two years?"

"That is for you to decide," replied his mother.

George looked sad, and then said, "No, I do not think I ought to risk putting it off two years."

"Well, then, say one year."

George hesitated a moment and then said, "I suppose if I ever ought to become a Christian, I ought to become one now."

“ Yes, George,” said his mother with indications of emotion, “ ‘ Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.’ ” “ ‘ Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for ye know not—’ ” She could not finish the sentence, but arose quickly and left the room. She went to her own apartments and there poured out her soul to God in prayer, hoping that her feeble words might bring George to a deep concern, and that he might soon be an earnest Christian.

George sat there awhile, astonished, surprised, worried. He could not understand why his mother should speak so abruptly to him about his eternal welfare. He began to think of his godly father’s life, and how he promised him to become a Christian man, which some time he intended to do, but had not thought of doing it soon. He thought how his mother promised his father to bring him up to be a Christian boy and young man. He felt that his mother had done all that she could do, but that he had not done his part. While he sat there waiting for his mother to return, many serious thoughts went through his mind. But when his mother did not return, he quietly arose, went to her room and hesitatingly opened the door to see whether his mother was asleep. He opened the door but a little ways when he saw his mother on her knees by the side of her bed engaged in earnest prayer.

He quickly closed the door and went to his own room. He could hardly decide whether to retire or not. He was very much troubled; he sat on the edge of the bed for a time meditating. He remembered how his mother taught him to pray in his childhood, but for several years he had not opened his mouth in prayer. He had not named the name of God save in blasphemy. All these things seemed sorely to convict him; but he had no desire to become a Christian. The thought came to him, why not pray that God might give me this desire. "I have been grievously wrong, why not pray to God to make me right?" He knelt down and prayed in a strange way: "Oh, Lord, I have forgotten thee. I have been very indifferent about my own soul. I have grieved my mother and burdened her heart. I know I ought to be a Christian and fulfill the promise to my father. But, oh, God, my heart is so hard, and I have no desire to be a Christian. If there is anything in religion, help me to become religious. My heart is very rebellious, if thou canst give me a better heart, I wish you would, for my heart is getting harder and harder every day." He felt that his prayer was a mockery. He thought the Lord did not hear him. He immediately arose and retired. He tried to sleep but could not. It seemed that the Lord, instead of giving him a desire to be religious, was convicting him

of sin and making him feel as if he were lost to all eternity. Every trivial word that he had ever spoken, every sinful act that he had ever committed, all the evil thoughts that he had ever thought, seemed to haunt him. He could neither sleep nor rest that night. He arose the next morning, having had very little sleep in the night. He shyly evaded his mother, fearing that she might say something to him. He worried through the day like a criminal going to the gallows, awaiting execution. He said nothing to his mother; his mother said nothing to him. Saturday night he went down town as usual, but he found no comfort or satisfaction; so he came home early and retired. This was a favorable indication to his mother and she prayed that night more earnestly than ever. Tired and worried out, he got some fitful sleep. When he was awake he thought of his miserable self, when he was asleep, he saw visions of despair. He awoke Sunday morning in a fitful, fretful mood. At the breakfast table, his mother said to him:

“George, you are going to church to-day, are you not?”

“I don’t know; I guess so,” he replied in a sort of reproachful way, as if he were saying, “I would have gone if you would not have asked me, but I don’t know whether I will go now or not.” The devil, however, tempted him and he decided

not to go. But that day was the most miserable he had yet spent. It seemed to him as if he were standing on the brink of hell. Like many others, he had to have a glimpse of hell before he had any desire to go to heaven. Toward evening George said to himself: "I am going to church to-night, and if God will help me I will give my heart to the Lord. I declare," said he, "I can't stand this any longer, and if there is such a thing as getting right with God, I am going to get right with him." At the supper table he said to his mother, "I am going to church with you to-night."

His mother's face lit up with an expression of joy, which George knew came from the depth of her heart, as she said, "You can not imagine how glad I am that you are."

When the time for services came he was ready to go with his mother to the meeting. There seemed to be a strange atmosphere in the meeting, different from what was in the church when George was last there. The Lord by his Spirit was there in power. The fire of the Holy Ghost was there and had warmed things up. An irresistible power seemed to have hold of George from the very beginning of the meeting. During the meeting he was swept nearer and nearer to the cross, where he would find rest for his troubled soul. The Lord at last was an-

swering his prayer. When the invitation was given for those to stand who desired to become Christians, George, in a manly way, was the first one to stand. His mother was overcome with joy. It was like an electric shock to the audience. No one was expecting George Axtell to become a Christian very soon. Had a cannon been fired off in the audience the surprise could not have been much greater. Others arose and expressed the same desire. In a small room downstairs, where the pastor had invited all those who were earnestly seeking the salvation of their souls, George Axtell, with a number of others, gave his heart to the Lord, and dedicated his life to the Master. He did it faithfully, definitely, prayerfully, and he knew what he had done. He put the matter of his salvation into the hands of the Lord and he left it there. He appreciated the great gift of salvation, which the Lord had led him to accept. He went home that night and decided, by the help of the Master, to consecrate his life to the winning of other souls to Jesus Christ. He was too honest to know that he was saved and then not care that another is lost. He could not be on the way to heaven and not care that another was on the way to hell. He was determined that if salvation was anything to him that he would make it something to some

one else. He was going to dedicate his life in humble service to the Lord, out of love for what the Lord had done for him.

CHAPTER III.

Almost a year had passed since the seven young men broke camp on the banks of the Tippecanoe. They were eagerly looking forward to the time when they would again pitch their tent at the same place for another season of recreation and pleasure. They were anxiously awaiting the time when Frank Basil would return from school, so that they might plan for the summer's outing. On the 27th of June he was to return. When the time arrived, Emmett Windom, Will Long, and Bert Moore went to the depot to meet him.

"We are very glad to see you," said Emmett Windom, after the boys had greeted him.

"I am very glad to be here," replied Frank, "and I am sure I will enjoy my vacation. I have been looking forward to the encampment with great anticipations."

"So have we," said Will Long, "and we have been gradually preparing for it as best we could. All the old fellows will be with us again. But say! Do you know that George Axtell has been converted?"

"Converted!" exclaimed Frank Basil. "Oh,

surely, that can't be. Well, I am sure if he is converted, he is converted thoroughly, for he never went into anything half-hearted."

"You would think so if you heard him talk," said Bert Moore. "He is almost a preacher. He has become very active in church work, and in the Young Men's Christian Association. You ought to hear him talk in meetings; the boys like to hear him, and he seems to have marvelous power in converting the fellows."

"I would like to see him try his hand on me, wittingly," said Frank Basil. "I hope he will not try and convert all of us and spoil the encampment for us."

"Well, you may just rest right there that he will," reproachfully replied Emmett Windom. "We will have a prayer meeting all the time."

"Oh, well," said Will Long, "who cares for that? His pious talk will not hurt me any. It won't do to leave George at home."

"Oh, no!" replied Emmett. "He can be our chaplain."

They had been walking along from the depot, up town, and as they passed the door of the store where George was clerking, he was waiting at the front to greet Frank. As they came near, he said, with his face beaming, "Hello, Frank! I am glad to see you."

"I am glad to see you, too," said Frank. "You look happy."

"Why should I not be? I have found a new joy since I saw you last."

"So I have heard. I am glad to know it."

"Are you, really, Frank?"

"Yes. I think it is a great thing to be a Christian; if one can believe that way."

"And he can believe that way," said George, "if he is willing to surrender to God. A sinful heart makes a skeptical head, you know, Frank."

"Well, good-bye, George. We must be going. We will see you again."

"Very well; but what about the encampment?"

"I will be with you, I am sure."

"That's good. Good-bye!"

"Didn't I tell you? It will be just like that during the whole encampment, if he is along," said Emmett.

"Oh," said Frank, "who cares for that? We will have lots of fun arguing."

"But he does not argue," said Bert Moore; "he just quotes scripture."

"Well, I don't believe much in scripture, so that will be all right."

"I don't think a little scripture would hurt us any," said Ralph Hill, who had just joined the company.

"What is the matter with you, Ralph? I believe George has about converted you."

"Well, I am sure that I would not mind being converted, if it gave me the joy it gave George. He has a source of joy that I haven't."

"I am sure I do not want any of it in mine," reproachfully replied Emmett Windom.

"Why not drop this prayer-meeting talk?" asked Will Long, as if he were disgusted with it.

"Yes! I say so too," joined Frank Basil.

They stood silent for a moment, and then Frank Basil said, "Well, boys, I must go home and see the folks, or else they will think I have gone back on them. When shall we meet to arrange for the encampment?"

"We will have to be doing it soon," said Will Long, "for if we are going in July, the time is short."

"Let's meet Sunday afternoon to make arrangements," said Emmett Windom.

"No use talking of that," said Ralph Hill. "George Axtell will never meet at that time."

"Neither will I," said Bert Moore.

Emmett looked at him with a sort of sarcastic grin, but said nothing.

"The only time that George can meet with us is Monday evening."

"Can't we meet without him?" said Emmett; "Just as like as not he will turn it into a prayer-meeting, anyway."

"That's mean for you to say that," said Bert Moore. "What have you against George?"

"Oh nothing ! but I don't like these converted folks."

"Well, shall we meet Monday night?" asked Frank Basil, slowly walking away.

"It suits us," said the boys.

"But where shall we meet?" asked Ralph Hill.

"You can meet in our office," replied Will Long.

"But who will see George?" asked Ralph Hill.

"I can see him," replied Bert Moore.

With this arrangement the boys separated to meet Monday evening, to make preparations for the encampment.

Monday evening came, and the boys were all present at Wright & Miller's law office where Will Long was stenographer, with the exception of George, who had to be late on account of his duties at the store.

"It is probable George can not be with us this year," said Bert Moore. "He does not know whether he can get away from the store."

"I am sure that I am not very sorry," said Emmett, who did not like converted folks, and especially when they were as much converted as George.

"Well, if George can not go, I will not go," said Bert Moore.

"If we are all going to back down, we might as well dismiss this matter at once," said Will Long, in a discouraging tone of voice.

Just then George came in with a smile on his face: "Am I late? I did not want to be, but I could not get away from the store any sooner."

"I hear there is a probability of you not being able to be with us this summer," said Frank Basil.

"Oh, yes! I have just gotten permission to be away at least three weeks this summer, beginning with the 15th of July."

"That's good," said all the boys but Emmett Windom.

"Why not arrange to go into camp about the fifteenth, if that is the time when George can get away?" asked Will Long.

"It will be as good a time as any," said Frank Basil.

They all agreed upon that time, and after making arrangements for transportation, and deciding what they were to take, they separated with the understanding that they were all to be ready to go into camp early on July 15th.

As they were about to separate George said, "Well, boys, I am going for a good time. I hope we may all have it."

After they had separated, Emmett Windom and Frank Basil were walking down street

together. "George is going to have a good time, he says. I declare, how he expects to have a good time I can not understand. And then, that is not the worst, he will spoil it all for us."

"Say Emmett, what makes you say that? I am sure I can have a good time when George is around, but you seem to despise him like a snake. I know he does not think about some things like I do, but he may be right for all that, and I respect him, if he lives up to what he believes. He is a mighty good fellow, and as sure as you live, there has been a mighty change in him since last year. There is a light in his eye and a smile on his face that I envy. I do not see why you do not like George, and why you have been saying such sarcastic things about him."

"Frank, I am not going to say another word about him, and I am going to make the best of his being with us."

"I am sure it will be good for him to be with us, and you need not make the best of it, it will be the best for us."

"Well, if you think so, all right. I will say no more about it."

"I wouldn't," said Frank.

The question was dropped, and they soon separated for the night.

CHAPTER IV.

The time between the meeting in Wright & Miller's law office and the fifteenth of July, when the boys were to go into encampment, was spent in making preparations and completing arrangements.

But the matter, which above all others concerned George Axtell, was how he might lead all the fellows, one by one, to Jesus Christ. Since the first encampment, there came into his life a new hope which transformed him. Knowing what it meant to be saved, he could not think of his fellows as being lost. It was impossible for George Axtell to possess the great gift of salvation, and not care that others were still under the judgment of condemnation. It was impossible for him to drink of the cup of salvation and not offer it to others. How could he appreciate the great joy that had come to him, and then not try and bring it to others? He could not think of the great sacrifice that Christ had made for him, without making some sacrifice for others.

The yearning desire of his heart was, "How may I win the boys to the Savior?" Of this

only he thought, for this only he planned, for this earnestly he prayed. He went into camp for no other purpose than this. He prayed for love to constrain him, for grace to strengthen him, for divine wisdom to direct him. He would not think of going into camp, if it were not for this supreme concern. Time was precious to him, and he would not think of sparing it, save for the hope of saving his fellows. But he appreciated the sacrifice that Christ had made for him and he was willing to make some sacrifice for others. When he realized what Christ had done for him, he was willing to do something for others.

He knew the boys were indifferent; but he believed the Spirit of God could convict them. He well knew that some of them were inclined to trifle; but he believed they could be brought to seriousness. He knew that some of them were spiritually blind; but he believed that Christ could open their blind eyes. He knew that some of them were spiritually deaf; but he believed that Christ could unstop their deaf ears. He felt that some of them "were dead in trespasses and sin;" but he believed that the Savior could bring them back to life.

He knew the characteristics of the fellows, and realized that "he needed to be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Most of his time till

the 15th of July was spent in studying "to become a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly divining the word of truth." His preparation for the encampment was a daily drill with the sword of the Spirit.

On the 15th of July, early in the morning, the boys were ready to go into camp. The clouds were heavy and threatened rain; but the boys thought they could get to their camping ground and pitch their tent before the rain. They got ready and started, but on their way a heavy storm came up and drenched the boys and their goods. When they reached the grounds their clothing was wet and dripping with rain, their food was damp and soggy. The rain kept pouring all day and night, so that it was a disagreeable task to pitch the tent and get comfortably located.

"This is a terrible beginning," said Ernest Moore.

"A poor beginning makes a good ending," replied George Axtell.

"What fools we were to start this morning," said Will Long, half in fun and half in aggravation.

"We must make the best of it now," said Ralph Hill, in submission.

"Well, praise the Lord, any how," joyously exclaimed George.

"That's good, George," said Frank Basil. "Keep us cheered up."

With his brow knit with anger, and his face contorted with pain, Emmett Windom had upon his tongue an oath, ready to let it go, as he pounded his thumb with the hatchet, attempting to drive a nail.

"Don't swear, don't swear," said Frank, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I guess I would, if George wasn't here."

"I am glad you have that much respect for me," kindly replied George.

In the midst of a drenching rain and a fierce gale, they at last succeeded in getting up the tent where they took shelter from the rain. By evening it had turned chilly, and the rain was still pouring down. Everything was damp, cold and disagreeable.

"Well, this is a picnic, I dare say," said Frank Basil. "I guess we will have to sit up all night, for everything is too wet to go to bed."

"We might put up a roost and sleep like the owl," humorously said George.

"That's good, George; look on the bright side."

"Why shouldn't I? No matter how dark and threatening the clouds may be, I look for the silver lining. No matter how overcast the heavens may be, I look for the breaking away of the clouds. Some people are born with indigo in

their blood—they are always blue. Some people have a buzz-saw in their brain—they are always ripping things to pieces.”

“How can they help it, when that’s their nature?” asked Will Long.

“We can be by grace what we are not by nature,” replied George. “I can testify to that fact.”

“Well, what is a man to do when he is born cross grained?”

“Be born again.”

“Oh, well, now don’t begin preaching to us already,” said Emmett Windom.

“All right, pardon me. You know it is in me, and ‘out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.’”

“There it is again. I declare, you can’t open your mouth unless out comes a passage of scripture.”

“I am glad that you are able to distinguish scripture, Emmett. But you know I am like Peter, ‘I can not but speak.’”

“Emmett,” said Frank Basil, “you had better keep still, or you will have a sermon before you know it.”

“All right; I’ll keep still.”

After a moment’s pause Will Long said, “Who can tell us a good story to-night?”

“I can,” replied George.

"All right; let's have it," said several of the boys.

"Well, a certain man had two sons, and the younger of them wasn't satisfied with his father's watchful care. He could not endure his watchful eye. Perhaps he thought his father was an 'old foggy,' and was too strict, so he said: 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me and I will leave home.'"

"There it is again for you, Emmett," interjected Will Long.

"Go on, go on, that's a good story," said all the boys but Emmett.

"No, I don't want to tell it if Emmett does not want to hear it."

"Yes, go on, I want to hear it," said Emmett.

"When the father saw that the younger son was not satisfied," continued George, "and that he would do no good at home, he gave him the portion that belonged to him and he let him go. And not many days after he gathered all together and took his journey into a far country. No doubt he went so far that he thought his father would not come after him. He took all with him, so that there might be nothing left to bring him back. But he soon wasted his substance in riotous living. No doubt he was having a good time, for which he had left home. And when he had spent all (perhaps he thought of becoming rich);

but when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land. There generally does. "The way of the transgressor is hard." And he began to be in want, and he did not know what to do. So he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country—just like many backsliders who forsake their Father's house and go back to the beggarly elements of the world and become slaves of Satan. Perhaps he thought that the strange master would treat him royally, but he sent him out to feed swine. The devil, boys, never makes, but unmakes a man. He never establishes, but overthrows him. He does not show them the end of their journey from the beginning for fear that they might revolt and leave him. He keeps the swine behind the hill until the dicker is made and then he sends them out to feed them. The old devil is pretty sly, isn't he? He pats a man on the back while he is putting a rope around the neck. He makes men believe that he is a good master until he has them fast, and then he becomes a cruel tyrant. He may let you sit down with him to his own table several times until you have joined yourself to him, but then he sends you out to associate with swine. You may think that in his service there is plenty, but at last he will bring you down to husks. He shows you a cup of pleasure but conceals the awful dregs. He sent him out to feed swine,

and he feign would have filled himself up with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. The devil becomes so tyrannic sometimes that he will not even let you have the dregs. And when he came to himself; he had been beside himself, and led on and on by Satan, he had gone mad. He had been under the hand of the devil, but he did not know it until he began to bear down so heavy that it was about to crush him. Some men do not know that they are under the thumb of the devil until he begins to press them hard; until they have come to the dregs; until they have come to the end of their string. Oh, it is a shame, isn't it, that some men must get down and wallow with the swine before they will have a desire for the Father's house. It is an awful thing that men must go so near hell before they will realize their condition and turn back to heaven. It is awful that some men must be brought to husks before they will desire a father's table.

“Such must have been the experience of this young man. When he came to himself, he said: ‘How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger? I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy

hired servants.' He had learned a lesson, hadn't he, that after all it was better to be at home in a father's house, with all its restraints, than to be a slave of a foreign master, with all its boasted liberty? That it was better to be a servant of his father even, with plenty to eat, than to be a slave of a foreign master feeding on husks. This is what every backslider must learn—that it is better to be a servant of the Lord, than to be a slave of the devil. That it is better to be a Christian, with all its restraints, than to be a sinner with all its boasted liberty. 'And he arose and came to his father.' ”

“That's a splendid story,” said Frank Basil; “but it is too long. You will have to leave the rest of it till some other time, George.”

“Well, I should say so,” said Emmett Windom.

“I am going to roost,” said Will Long, as he arose and began to make preparations to retire.

“Very well,” said George; “I do not want to tire you the first night.”

“I am sure you did not, but it is time to retire.”

“Well, boys,” said George, “let's just have a word of prayer, before we go, will you?”

“All right,” said some of the boys. But it was a new thing in the camp and it surprised them very much. Emmett Windom looked at

Frank Basil with an expression on his face as if he were saying, "I told you so." But they all knelt down and George led them in a short, happy prayer.

As George arose from his knees he noticed that Ralph Hill seemed moved, and that there was a moisture in his eye. He said nothing to him, but he also retired, and as he lay there he prayed earnestly that the Lord would apply the story of the prodigal son to Ralph's heart, for he knew that he had at one time been a professor, but had become a backslider. As the boys lay there trying to go to sleep, they thought "How wonderful is the change which has come over George." But soon they dismissed the story and the prayer from their minds and all were asleep, but Ralph, who lay awake the greater part of the night tossing to and fro upon his couch.

CHAPTER V.

The strong wind that kept blowing all night rent the clouds from the heavens, and drove them away, so that the morning dawned bright, but chilly. The boys had all left the tent and were out in the sunshine, catching its warm rays. George Axtell, Ralph Hill and Bert Moore were sitting on a log near the bank of the river sunning themselves and enjoying the warm rays of the sun as they were reflected from the water into their faces.

George was quietly singing:

“Oh happy day that fixed my choice,
On Thee, my Savior and my God.”

“You seem to be happy this morning, George,” said Ralph Hill.

“Why should I not be? You are missing the greatest joy of your life in not being a Christian.”

“It seems so, to be about you,” said Bert Moore.

“I tried to be a Christian once,” said Ralph Hill, “but I gave it up. For me there is nothing in it.”

“You tried what?” asked George.

“Why, to be a Christian.”

"You can't be a Christian by trying. As long as you are trying to be a Christian, it is very evident that you are not one. So long as Noah was trying to get into the ark, it is very evident that he was not in the ark. If you are trying to be a Christian, then you are not yet one."

"Well, George, if we are not to be Christians by trying, how then can we be Christians?"

"It is not try, but trust. And whenever you stop trying and try trusting, then there will be some hope for you, Ralph. If I had to lead a Christian life by trying to do this and trying to do that, then I would give up just as you did. To lead a Christian life is to implicitly trust Christ, not only to be saved, but also to be kept. The grace that saves a man, is also sufficient to keep a man; if it does not keep him, I doubt very much whether it saves him. Noah was saved, not by trying to swim the flood, but by trusting to the ark. You will be saved, not by fighting the condemnation that is upon you, but by faith getting into Christ. The first-born in Egypt were spared, not by fighting the death angel, but by putting the blood on the door-posts. Your sins will be pardoned, not by fighting them, but by putting them under the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. Ralph, if you ever are saved you must believe that Jesus Christ can save you, and then implicitly trust him to do it. The trouble with

you was, that you tried to swim the current alone, and when you were exhausted, then you gave up. You tried to fight the battle in your own strength, and when you were about to be overcome then you beat a hasty retreat, and gave up in despair."

"Do you mean to say, George, that we need do nothing to be saved?"

"We can do nothing, Ralph. So long as you think that you can do something, or that you must do something, you are not yet saved. Being saved is not what we can do, but trusting to what Christ has done. His salvation is complete. There is nothing left for us to do. When He gives the invitation, He says, 'Come, for all things are ready.' When He provided salvation for the whole world, He said, 'It is finished.'"

"But will we not have to serve the Lord to be saved?"

"No. We serve the Lord, not to be saved, but because we have been saved. Salvation is not of works, but works is of salvation. When you once fully trust Christ to be saved, then he will save you; for he has promised to do it. 'For all the promises in Him are Yea, and in Him Amen.' And then knowing that you are saved, by trusting to the merits of Christ's death upon the cross, you will no longer work to be saved, but because you have been saved. The love of Christ

which you will then know, will constrain you to freely do those things, because you have been saved, which before you thought you had to do in order to be saved."

"I do not understand you, George. You say there is nothing that we can do or can try to do to be saved, and yet you say we must trust him."

"Well, if you call trusting doing anything, then we must do that. But trusting is not doing anything; it is letting Christ do it. So long as you try to trust, it is very evident that you do not trust. Trusting is just taking our hands off of ourselves and throwing ourselves entirely over onto the Master. To be saved, is by faith to appropriate God's great gift of salvation, which he has provided by his death upon the cross, and then knowing that you have accepted this great gift of salvation, and that you are saved, you will do all that you can do for the Master. Yea, you will do far more for him, now that you are saved, than before you tried to do in order to be saved. To serve the Lord to be saved is slavery; to serve Him because you have been saved is liberty. The trouble with you, Ralph, is that you 'get the cart before the horse,' and so long as you do that you will not make much progress in your Christian life. If I had to be saved by doing this or that, then I would give up too, for there is nothing that I can do to be saved."

"Why is it then, George, that you are so active in Christian work, and seem to be serving the Lord with all your heart?"

"Oh, Ralph! what little I do for the Master, I do, not to be saved, but because I have been saved. I can not help but serve the Lord, out of thankfulness for His great gift of salvation. If I did not serve him it would be very evident that I was not saved."

"That is very strange doctrine to me, George, I can hardly believe you."

"I don't want you to believe me. Are you willing to believe the Word of God for it?"

"Yes! If you can give me satisfactory evidence from God's Word that what you say is true, then I will believe you."

"I will only be too glad to give you the Word for it. Here, you take my Bible and read the passages as I will give them to you."

"Why, George, I am afraid you have me now, for it is very doubtful whether I can find them."

"You don't know where to find them!" replied George in astonishment.

"No! the Bible is rather a new thing to me."

"No wonder you are a backslider. Well, I will read them to you, and you listen. In Proverbs iii: 5, it says: 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.' Then in Isaiah xxvi: 3, 4, we read: 'Thou wilt

keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee. Trust in the Lord forever; for in Jehovah is everlasting strength.' To have our minds stayed on Him, is to constantly trust Him. Then Jude i: 24, is a very precious verse to me: 'Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with exceeding great joy.' It is not a question whether He is able to keep you, but whether you will implicitly trust Him and let Him keep you. The Lord would have His hands full trying to keep a man whose will was not surrendered to God's will and who was not trusting Him to be kept. If you will give yourself entirely over into His hands He will keep you, and no man will be able to pluck you out of His hands. Let the Lord get hold of you and He will keep you, but if you only take hold of the Lord you can let go at the first temptation and fall. But you let the Lord take hold of you and 'no man will be able to pluck you out of His hands.' Then again in Romans vi: 23, we read: 'The wages of sin is death, but the GIFT OF GOD IS EVERLASTING LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.' What do you do with a gift when it is offered to you? You don't strive for it, you don't work for it, you don't agonize for it, you don't merit it, but what do you do?"

"Why, I suppose, George, that I would just take it."

“ Yes, and what else ?”

“ Why go on rejoicing that I have it.”

“ And what else ?”

“ Why, love and thank the giver for it.”

“ Just so, Ralph; and when you once by faith accept God’s great gift of salvation, you will love and serve Him for that great gift. If you do not love Him and serve him gladly then it is very evident that you have not accepted His great gift of everlasting life. Then in Romans v: 1—”

“ Well, George, you need not read any more; that ought to be sufficient to convince any man.”

“ Will you then right now, fully, implicitly trust Christ to be saved ?”

“ Indeed, I would like to be a Christian, but I have lived so far away from God, and have been such a miserable backslider, that I am afraid that God would not receive me.”

“ That’s a good way to feel, Ralph. I think there is some hope for you. Unless you feel yourself unworthy, God will not deem you worthy. When the prodigal of whom I told you last night had gotten to the end of his string and came to himself and saw his woeful condition, then there was some hope for him. Until you come to yourself and realize your awful sin and how you have grieved your Heavenly Father, there will not be much hope for you. But the moment you come to yourself and see your miserable self

and become penitent for your sin as did the prodigal and then come to God and ask forgiveness, there will be no doubt then about His receiving you. I did not get to finish my story of the prodigal son last night; but you remember when he arose and came to his father, the father, when he was yet a great way off, ran out to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him and welcomed him back home again. The father did not let him stand without and plead and plead, just to be taken back as a hired servant. The father did not chide him for his wanderings, or throw his sin into his face, saying, 'Ah, yes, when you got to the end of your string, then like a hungry dog you come back for the last bone. When you have squandered your inheritance, then you come back to your father's house. When you have had your fill of the bondage of a cruel master, then you are willing to stay at home with your father.' Oh, no, he never said these words; but when the son began to make his confession and say, 'I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as—' and there he stopped. He never finished that sentence, his father cut him short by saying, 'This is my son who was lost and is found. Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hands and shoes on his feet; and

bring forth the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry.' He was glad to take him back again as his own son. And, Oh, Ralph," said George with much earnestness, "you may have gone far from Him, but if you are penitent, and are willing to return and confess your sin, then before the confession is made he will receive you. I am not afraid about him receiving you, but I am afraid that you will not return. When the Heavenly Father sees the first faint desire in your heart to return, he will cherish it with his love and try to win you back. But if you are not willing to return he may leave you alone and let you go into the depth of the prodigal with its awful experiences. If you go on you will at last come to utter spiritual want and woe. For the Bible says, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee; know, therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.' "

"I have reached that point now," said Ralph, with tears in his eyes.

"Well, then, why not say, as did the prodigal, 'I will arise and go to my father,' and then arise and go?"

Ralph bit his lips, but said nothing.

George remained silent for a moment, expect-

ing an answer from Ralph. But when he made no answer he said, "Ralph, do you know that there is not one harsh word in the entire Bible for the penitent backslider? But all through it there rings this glad word, 'Return, return. Return unto me and I will return unto you. Return, Oh, backsliding Israel, return, and I will heal your backsliding. Oh, Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thy iniquity.'

"Think of Peter. You remember what a miserable backslider he was; how a short time before the Savior's crucifixion he said with oaths and curses that he did not know the Lord. And what aggravates his backsliding, is the fact that he had been with the Savior during his entire ministry. He had seen him heal the sick, make the blind to see, and the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear; he had seen Him raise the dead, and he had heard that voice from heaven which said 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' But Peter went back upon Him and denied that he knew Him. Oh, what an awful sin it was, what a terrible backslider he became! Christ was crucified, He was buried, and the third day He arose from the dead. To the women who came early in the morning to the sepulcher there was given this blessed message, 'Go tell the disciples and Peter, that I

will see them again in Galilee; as I said unto them.' Why did he say 'go tell the disciples and Peter'? Wasn't Peter one of the disciples, and would he not have been included if he had said 'Go tell the disciples?' Why did he so specify Peter? Why did he not say 'Go tell the disciples and John or and James?' Ah, it was Peter who needed that loving message. He could not think of Peter, his chief disciple, becoming a backslider. He could not think of him who had once confidentially said, 'Thou art the Christ, thou art the Son of God.' So he sent His loving message to him to restore him to his former place of joy. And so also he is anxious for you. You are grieving him more by your wandering than the ninety and nine that went not astray. If you only realized how anxious was the Savior for your return, you would not hesitate longer but you would at once return to Him and be restored. You may know the very moment that he accepts you, and that is the very moment when you return to Him, for He said, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' Will you come? Will you return just now? Will you say as the prodigal said, 'I will arise and go to my father'? As that father received the prodigal, so your Heavenly Father will receive you. Will you come to Him? Come to Him right now. Why will you go further on in sin and rebellion and

break His loving heart, and grieve His forgiving spirit, when He is yearning for your return and is patiently and anxiously looking for your homecoming ? ”

Ralph remained silent while George was earnestly pleading with him. George waited a moment and then said: “ Will you kneel down here with me and pray that you may be made willing to return ? ”

Ralph shook his head very emphatically as he said “ Not now.”

“ So you are not willing to return to him and be forgiven for having so sorely grieved him ? Why will you not kneel down and ask him to forgive you ? If you do he will forgive you, for the Bible says, ‘ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. ’ ”

“ Oh,” said Ralph, “ I hate to come to Him now when I have grieved Him so long.”

“ But do you not know, Ralph, that you are hurting Him a thousand times more by staying away from Him, than if you would just come back to Him ? The prodigal could not grieve his father by coming home to him, but, oh, how he would have grieved him by longer having remained away from him. Will you not now kneel down and say, Lord, I will return to thee, and henceforth follow thee, and do it as you say it ? ”

Ralph hesitated a moment, as if he were having the greatest struggle of his life, and then he said very decidedly, "I will." And as he did it God seemed to pour into his soul the blessed assurance that He had accepted him, and he arose from his knees rejoicing that he was a child of God.

CHAPTER VI.

Bert Moore, who greatly admired George Axtell and his Christian spirit, down in his heart, wished that he might also find the secret of his joy and peace. He also noticed that Ralph Hill, who frequently sneered at religion, and had said that "there was nothing in it, that it was a mere sentiment," now seemed transformed, and instead of sneering at the things which George had to say, now endorsed them, and would help to defend him against the sarcasm of the other boys. Then, too, Ralph Hill, the year before, and just a day before, was sullen and sarcastic toward religion, but now seemed happy and contented. In his eyes there seemed to be a new light, in his heart there was a different spirit, from his lips there came a different song.

Bert Moore had frequently thought that if there was anything in religion that he would like to have it, but now he was convinced that there was something in religion and he wanted it. He noticed that there was something that drew George and Ralph together that did not draw him; he saw between them a sympathy that did not touch him; he saw a motive in them that

did not move him. If he did not yearn to be just like them he did desire to know the secret that made them what they were.

Then he had been sitting by when George spoke to Ralph those wonderful words which led him to Jesus Christ as his Savior. They were a revelation to him as well as to Ralph. When he thought of them he yearned more and more to be a Christian.

One day passed, and then another, and all the while he was troubled. The marvelous words of George, and the seeming change in Ralph haunted him. Often he had thought of being a Christian, now he yearned to be one with a yearning that distressed him. He had imagined many difficulties in the way, now he wished they were out of the way. He thought George could help him if he only asked him, but because of timidity or pride he did not ask him. "If they are saved," he would say to himself, "why do they not say something to me about the salvation of my soul?"

Though George or Ralph had said nothing to him about becoming a Christian, yet they had earnestly prayed for him and were waiting for an opportunity to speak to him. The opportunity seemed a long time coming. George decided to make an opportunity, if possible.

He was sitting alone in the tent one day

meditating how he might lead all the fellows to Christ. His success with Ralph and the seeming concern of George encouraged him. "If I only could get an opportunity to speak to Bert Moore," he said, "I believe he would be converted, for I know that he has been thinking about the matter."

Frank Basil, Emmett Windom and Will Long, who had become somewhat attached to each other, had taken the boat and gone down the river.

George arose and went to the door of the tent to see what had become of Ralph Hill and Bert Moore. In the distance, on a little knoll, he saw them reclining under the shade of a tree. "I am going over there, too," said he. "Perhaps that is the best opportunity I will ever have of talking to Bert." He straightway went to where the boys were, and as he drew near Ralph said:

"I am glad you have come, George. I have been talking to Bert about becoming a Christian, and he says he would like to be one, but there seem to be difficulties in the way, and it seems dark and mysterious."

"It is the simplest thing in all the world," straightway replied George. "Why, the way is so plain, that a man though a fool need not err therein."

"Then I must be a fool," said Bert; "for it does seem to me the most mysterious thing in all the world. If I just knew how to become a Christian, I am sure that I would do it."

"I think, Bert," said Ralph, "the simplicity of the matter staggers you, just as it did me."

"I am sure that is what is the matter," said George. "If the Lord required some great thing of Bert, he would be willing to do it, rather than do the simple thing he tells him to do."

"I am sure, George, I am willing to do almost anything to be saved, if I only knew what it was that I ought to do."

"Well, Bert, if you are willing to become a Christian, I am sure I can, by the aid of the Bible, show you the way."

"If I know my own heart," said Bert, "I am willing; but it seems as if the Lord does not save me."

"What do you mean, Bert? Do you expect the Lord to come down, and pick you up and bodily carry you into the Kingdom of Heaven? Or do you expect the Lord to come down and whisper in your ears—that you are saved?"

"I scarcely know what I do want, save that I want to be saved, and I want to be sure that I am saved."

"You may be sure," said George. "You may

know the very time when, and the very place where you were saved. You may know the very time when your sins were pardoned, and when you became a child of God."

"I would give a good deal, George, if I only knew whether I was saved, and I would not care much about the time or place," said Bert, with a sigh.

"Yes! but you must be converted some time, you must be converted some place, and it is a source of consolation to know just where one has been saved. It becomes a milestone in their life, back of which it is hard to go."

"Well, how may I know the time and place, George?"

"Do you believe the Bible," asked George.

"Most certainly I do," replied Bert.

"Will you take its promises and statements concerning your salvation?"

"I do not see why I shouldn't."

"If you will take the testimony of the Word concerning your salvation, then I can help you; but if you will cling to any preconceived notions of your own how you want to be saved, or how you ought to be saved, or if you are depending upon your moods and feelings to be saved, then I can not help you."

"Why, George! you do not mean to say that a man can be saved without feeling, or without a wonderful experience, do you?"

“Why, Bert, feeling is not a condition of salvation. It is only mentioned twice in the Bible and in no instance in connection with salvation or the assurance of salvation. We can not control our feelings; then because we have not a certain kind of feeling, are we to be lost?”

“But, George, do you not feel that you are saved?”

“I know it,” emphatically replied George.

“How can you know it if you do not feel it?”

“I feel I am saved because I know it, but I do not know it because I feel it. There is only one way in which we may know that we are saved.”

“And what is that, George?”

“The only way in which I can be sure of my salvation is from the direct testimony of the Bible. I don’t want any other testimony. That is good enough for me. ‘A faithless generation seeketh after a sign.’ I don’t want a sign. I believe God’s Word for my salvation. If you will not believe God’s Word for the assurance of your salvation I doubt, Bert, whether you would believe if one rose from the dead. I would not believe, I am sure, for hundreds might arise from the dead, but that would be no ground of assurance that I was saved. You might have many experiences, and waves of feeling, but that would be no ground of assurance of your salvation. I can trust God’s word for my salvation, when I can not trust my

moods and feelings and experiences. My moods and feelings are as changeable as April weather, now sunshine, and then shadow. My Christian life would be very changeable if I looked within for assurance of my salvation. But I look away from self to Christ. My assurance is just like himself, 'the same to-day, yesterday and forever.' I have never had any feeling regarding the matter. I am glad I haven't had, for if I would have had some wonderful feeling, I would always have depended upon that feeling instead of fixing my faith in Christ."

"Why, George! Why is it, then, that some have such wonderful feeling when they are converted?"

"Feeling is sometimes a result of conversion, but it is never a condition of it," replied George. "We may have great feeling and not be saved, or we may have no feeling and be saved."

"That is so," said Ralph Hill. "I can testify to that myself. One time I was under the influence of a powerful meeting and my emotions were terribly stirred. Wave after wave of feeling swept down over me. I, like many others, had been looking for an experience just like that, and I came away from that meeting saying to myself: 'Thank the Lord I am saved at last. I am converted now.' But in a few days all that feeling was gone, all those waves of emotion had sub-

sided, and I was let down deeper into despair than ever. I wondered what had become of that which I called conversion. I gave up in disgust. I became skeptical. I said, 'It is all a delusion.' I threw the whole matter of religion overboard and gave it no more concern until the other day when George began talking to me. I realized that there was some joy in the lives of some Christians, but I never knew the secret of that joy until George led me into it the other day by giving me some precious promises. I stepped out upon them and I am standing there yet."

"It is so every time," said George. "I am sure that I can not trust my feelings. If I would have had a great experience when I was converted I believe I would discard it, for I want something better than that to rest my salvation upon."

"I would not wait for feeling. The Lord often converts a man in an entirely different way from that in which he wants to be converted. If a man wants to ride into the kingdom of heaven on a hobby, just as like as not the Lord will make him get down and walk. If a man wants to be converted by going to the mourners' bench, shouting hallelujah, just as like as not the Lord will convert him without a word. If a man wants to be converted decently and in order, just as like as not he will never be converted until he goes to

the mourners' bench and shouts hallelujah. If a man wants to be converted like his grandfather was, as like as not the Lord will convert him in a way unheard of before. If a man wants to be converted in a meadow, as like as not the Lord will convert him in a haymow. If a man wants to be converted in the woods, like as not the Lord will convert him in a saw-mill. Time, place and manner is not conversion. Conversion is a fact that you have forsaken your sin, and trusted to the merits of Christ's death upon the cross for the pardoning of your sin."

"Why, George, you confuse me, and you make me distrust myself."

"That is just what I want to do; for so long as you depend in the least upon self, or your moods and feelings, so long you do not implicitly trust Christ. You are saved not by what you can do but by what Christ has done. You can not do one single thing to be saved, save to trust to what Christ has done."

"But I do not see it in that way, George."

"It does not matter how you see it, or how I see it. What does the Word of God say about it?"

"All right. I said I would believe His Word, and if you can show me by the Bible that you are right, I will believe it."

"Very well. In John iii: 16, we read: 'For

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever BELIEVETH in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' Do you believe that?"

"Why, yes; certainly."

"Well, if they shall not perish but have everlasting life, who believe in Him whom He has sent, then if you believe in him you shall not perish but have everlasting life. Then, here again, in John v: 24, we read: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.' Do you believe on the Son?"

"I believe that Jesus Christ lived and died."

"But that is not enough; the devil believes that and trembles. Do you believe ON Him—that is, do you fully trust to the merits of His death upon the cross for the ground of your pardon and reconciliation?"

"No, I do not know as I do."

"Well, if you did you would know it."

"Can a man certainly know what he believes?"

"Why, certainly! He may not know what he feels, but he ought to know what he believes. You know whether you believe that I am talking to you or not. You know whether you believe that is Ralph sitting there. You know whether you believe you are an American. If you do not know whether you believe it, then you doubt it. So you may know whether you believe upon

Jesus Christ as your Savior. If you do not know it then you doubt it. You may have a sort of intellectual belief that Christ lived and died, but that is not believing ON Him. 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.' You must implicitly trust Him to be saved. You might be sick and believe that a certain remedy would heal you, but that would not heal you. You would have to take the remedy. So you may believe that Jesus Christ lived and died, but that will not save you, you must believe ON Him, appropriate Him by faith as your Savior and then follow Him as Lord and Master."

"You make it very plain, George, but somehow or other it does not take hold of me."

"What you want to do is by faith to take hold of that promise, and then, perhaps, it will take hold of you."

"I wish I could."

"Well, Bert, what has a man that believeth on the Son?"

"I don't know."

"Well, what does the Bible say he has?"

"Why, everlasting life."

"Do you believe on the Son? That is, do you trust Him? Do you, by faith, appropriate Him as your Savior?"

"Yes, George; I believe I can now do that."

"What have you then?"

“ Why, everlasting life.”

“ Isn't that plain enough ? ”

“ It seems as if it ought to be.”

“ Then again, in the sixteenth chapter of Acts we read, that when Paul and Silas were in prison and were miraculously delivered, the jailor, being convicted by the supernatural power manifested in the prison, came running and said, ‘ What must I do to be saved ? ’ And they said, ‘ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ Now, if a man must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, then just as soon as he believes on him, then he is saved, is he not ? ”

“ I suppose so,” reluctantly replied Bert.

“ You suppose so,” said George, in astonishment. “ Don't you know so ? ”

“ Yes, if the word of God is true, I know so.”

“ If the word of God is true ! Isn't it true ? ”

“ Yes, it is.”

“ That's better. Then what is a man who believes on him ? ”

“ From the testimony of the Word he is saved.”

“ Well, do you believe on Him ? ”

“ Yes, but I do not know whether I believe on Him enough, or whether I trust him enough.”

“ When you have trusted Him implicitly, then you have trusted Him enough. So long as you trust to anything in the least—to what you are or have been, to what you do or have done, to

what you have or may have, then you are not trusting Him enough. 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding.' 'By grace are ye saved, through faith.' 'It is not of works, lest any man should boast.' Then I want to give you the verse that converted Ralph the other day, Rom. vi: 23, 'The gift of God is everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

"That's the one that opened my eyes," said Ralph Hill.

"If I were to offer you a gift," asked George, "what would you do with it, Bert?"

"Take it, I suppose."

"Why, then, will you not take the gift of everlasting life from the hands of the Savior? Isn't His word as good as mine?"

"Indeed, I would like to accept that great gift, but I do not know how."

"If I were to offer you a gift you would not stand up and say, 'Indeed, I would like to have it, but I do not know how to take it.' You would just reach out your hand and take it, wouldn't you?"

"Ah, yes. But, George, if you would offer me a gift I would know very well how to reach out my hand and take it, and I could feel it, too, when I had it."

"Just so. And so you can just put out your

hand of faith and take the great gift of salvation, or everlasting life, and then by the assurance of faith you may also know that you have everlasting life when you have once accepted it. The only way that I know that I have everlasting life is, because I know I have, by faith, accepted it. You must remember, Bert, that salvation, or everlasting life, is not a physical thing which you can feel with your senses, but it is a spiritual thing and must be spiritually discerned. If you would only put out your hand of faith and accept the great gift of salvation, then you might also, by the sense of faith, know that you had it."

"If you will just tell me how to reach out my hand of faith and take the great gift of salvation, I assure you that I will very quickly do it. It is that which staggers me."

"I can't explain it, Bert, but I can illustrate it."

"Well, that will be as well."

"If your father were to offer you \$10,000, payable to you in three years, would you take it?"

"Why, of course I would."

"How would you take it? You are not to have it till in three years."

"Well, I could accept his promise for it."

"What would you be exercising in accepting his promise for \$10,000 in three years?"

"I suppose you would call it faith."

"What would you call it?"

“ I guess I would call it faith, too.”

“ Well, as you exercised faith in accepting that promise of your father for \$10,000 in three years, why will you not exercise that same faith in your Heavenly Father for Everlasting Life, which he has promised to you, not in three years, but at the end of life? It may be three days, it may be three weeks, it may be three years, or it may be thirty years. Exercising faith in the promise of God for everlasting life, that is putting forth your hand of faith and taking it. If you can exercise faith in your father's promise for \$10,000 for three years, why can you not exercise faith in your Heavenly Father's promise for everlasting life while you live on earth? For three years you would be claiming your father's promise, then why not for the remainder of your life claim by faith your Heavenly Father's promise? Your father might go back on his promise, but your Heavenly Father never will. And as you would rest assured of \$10,000 of your father in three years, if you have accepted his promise, so you may rest assured of everlasting life of your Heavenly Father at death, if you have accepted His promise for it. The faith in your father's promise would give you the assurance of the \$10,000. So faith in your Heavenly Father's promise ought to give you assurance of everlasting life. ‘He that hath the Son hath everlasting

life.' If you believe on the Son, you have everlasting life just as surely as you have \$10,000, if you accept or believe in your father's promise. If your father's promise is good, you will have \$10,000 the very moment you accept his promise, though you will not come into full possession of the amount until three years; if your Heavenly Father's promise is good, you will have everlasting life the very moment you will accept it, though you may not come into full possession of it until death."

"Well, George, I do believe on the Son, but I am not satisfied."

"But if you believe on the Son, and you have everlasting life, why are you not satisfied? What more do you want?"

"Well, it seems to me that God ought to tell me that I have everlasting life."

"Why, Bert! He has told you, and that as plainly as He can tell you."

"When did He ever tell me?"

"Right here is His Word. In very plain words he says: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.' Then if you believe on the Son is He not right here saying to you: 'You have everlasting life?'"

"Yes, George, I understand you, but I do not feel the truth of it."

"I do not want you to feel the truth of it; I want you to BELIEVE the truth of it."

“ It seems as if you put the ground of assurance of salvation on the Word of God.”

“ Why, Bert, what other ground of testimony is there? ‘ He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not the Son, hath made Him out a liar, because he hath not believed on the record that God gave of His Son.’ ”

“ I do not know what else to do. I do believe on the Son.”

“ There is nothing else that you can do.”

“ Why, then, haven’t I peace?”

“ Because you do not believe on the Word, or the record that God gave of his Son. Over here in Romans we read: ‘ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ If you have faith, why then have you not peace?

“ I know. It is either because you haven’t faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, or else you do not believe His Word when it says you ought to have peace if you have faith.”

“ Well, George, it must be the latter, for I do believe in Christ as my Savior.”

“ Then don’t you see that you are making God out a liar?”

“ Oh, don’t say that, George.”

“ Don’t you want me to speak the truth?”

“ Certainly! Certainly!”

“Then what else can I say?”

Tears came into Bert's eyes and he could not speak for emotion.

“Bert,” said George after a moment's pause, “if the Lord were to come down and write on a piece of paper, that you ought to have peace, would you believe Him or would you still doubt His Word?”

“I am sure I would believe Him.”

“Well, Bert,” said George in a sympathetic tone of voice, “God has very plainly written out to you that blessed message, and here I will show it to you. You can read it for yourself.”

Bert read: “Therefore being justified by faith, we HAVE peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He sprang to his feet, threw his arms about George's neck, and wept for joy, saying, “I see it all now.”

He had found the assurance of eternal life by taking the testimony of God's Word.

CHAPTER VII.

A little more than a week had passed since the boys had pitched their tent and gone into camp. Two had been won to Christ, but two seemingly had been hardened. One was not being influenced either one way or the other. It was Will Long. He was one of those indifferent fellows who seemed to care nothing for Christianity, neither did he say anything against it. When he was approached on the subject of religion, he would turn it off as a huge joke. Talking to him about being religious was like "pouring water on a duck's back."

But the boys had been putting in a word at every possible opportunity, and had also been earnestly praying for him. At times he had been seriously thinking about something. George Ax-tell yearned to have an extended, earnest talk with him, but Will Long was so inclined to trifle that he knew it would have to be done when he was in one of his serious moods, and as he did not have these very frequently, his opportunities for serious talks were scarce. George realized that the word would have to be in season. He

knew that he would have to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

Frank Basil and Emmett Windom had planned to go back to the city on Saturday and bring with them some things which they had forgotten. George thought, "I hope this may be the time when I can lead Will Long to Christ, or at least to a concern for his soul."

Early Saturday morning Emmett Windom and Frank Basil took the boat and started to the city without asking any of the other boys to go along, not even Will Long, who had frequently associated with them. It pricked Will to the heart to be slighted in this manner. He was left alone with the boys who, he knew, would be talking religion all day; this was not pleasant to him. Ordinarily he would have thought nothing of being left with them, for he would have passed over trivially everything that the boys might have said about religion. But now the Spirit of the Lord was striving with him and he was ill at ease. He did not want them to say anything to him about religion for he was too serious to trifle, and yet he was not willing to yield to Christ. George saw that he was evading him, and would try to turn aside every conversation that bore in any way upon religion. But these symptoms all the more encouraged George, for he saw that the spell of his indifference was broken, and that the

Lord was having a controversy with him. He felt that now was the time to speak to him about the concern of his soul. All day long he waited and watched for an opportunity to speak to him, but none seemed to come. He was not discouraged, for he saw that Will was in the hands of the Lord, and so long as His Spirit was striving with him there would be no time lost. The day was almost gone, Emmett Windom and Frank Basil had returned from the city, and he knew that there would be no other opportunity that day. But he was satisfied, for he knew that the Lord was convicting him mightily of sin, and he was content to wait. He decided no longer to look for an opportunity to speak to him, but to let the Lord open the way and present the opportunity.

Sabbath morning came. There seemed to be a deep solemnity in nature. Scarcely a breeze stirred, not a leaf seemed to move. The stillness of the forest seemed oppressive. Now and then a bird would give a wailing cry. The rain dove's doleful notes could be heard in the distance. These more than ever seemed to oppress his contrite soul.

All the boys were sitting on the bank of the river, watching its quiet waters, which seemed to sympathize with nature. The river seemed sluggish, no motion could be seen about it, save now

and then a fish would leap out of the water and would send the ripples from shore to shore. The only thing which broke the solemnity was their merry laughter as it echoed across the river.

Suddenly, like a solemn peal, the notes of the church bell came floating to them on the air, from the city in the distance. As the first note reached the ears of the boys there was a deep silence. They listened quietly to its solemn peal, and as the last note died away, George said:

“Boys, I wish I was up there to go to church.”

“I am sure that I would go with you,” said Ernest Moore.

“It has been a long time since I have been to church,” said Ralph Hill, “and I am sure that I would be with you. It is time that I am starting again.”

“You have not become converted, too?” said Emmett Windom, who knew he had been converted, but had not before had the opportunity to taunt him about it.

“You hope I have not been converted. Why should you hope anything like that? It is the most important thing that a man can do. ‘For what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?’”

“‘Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness,’” said Ernest Moore.

“Come on, Frank, let’s go!” said Emmett.

"I am getting tired of scripture and prayer-meeting talk."

"Why, it does not hurt you, does it?" said Frank.

"No! but it seems that nothing can be said unless it is switched off onto religion. Come on! let's go."

Emmett walked off with an expression of disgust on his face. Frank waited a moment and then followed leisurely.

"Aren't you getting tired of this pious talk, and such camping as this, Frank?"

"Why, no," replied Frank. "Why should I get tired of it? I rather enjoy it. It has done me much good to be down here. I must confess that some of the things which George has said, and the spirit the boys have manifested, and the joy they seem to have, has almost made me wish that I was a Christian."

"Well, I declare," said Emmett. "If we don't soon break camp, we will all be converted, I am afraid. Frank, you are the last one from whom I would expect a remark such as you just made. The next thing you will be converted."

"Well, Emmett, if it were not for my miserable doubts and intellectual difficulties, I think I would be a Christian. But as I believe now I can not honestly be one."

"I don't bother my head about it. I would

not be a Christian if I could," conceitedly said Emmett.

"Why not?"

"Oh, let's stop this, or you will soon be preaching to me, too."

"All right," said Frank; and the conversation was changed as they walked up the river.

As Emmett and Frank started up the river Will Long looked after them with a longing look as if he yearned to go with them, but as they did not invite him he remained with the other boys on the bank of the river.

George was waiting for an opportunity to speak to him. The days were passing and thus far only two had been converted. He had his heart set on winning every one of the boys to the Savior, if possible. George would have spoken to Will, but he was waiting for the Lord to open the way, and he believed that He would.

After Emmett and Frank had gone there seemed to be an unnatural earnestness on the part of the boys, and as they lay there, looking in the distance, they seemed to be in deep meditation.

In the silence of the moment Bert Moore said in his winning way, "Will, why don't you give your heart to the Lord and lead a Christian life? If you knew the joy and peace there is in serving the Master I am sure you would do it at once."

"I guess I ought," said Will in a sort of an indifferent way.

Bert did not answer him, and after a moment's pause George said, "Well, Will, if you ought to be a Christian and are not you are committing a sin every moment that you are not a Christian."

"I do not see how that can be," said Will, looking up with an expression of doubt.

"Well, the Bible says, 'He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin.' And if you know that you ought to be a Christian and are not one, you are committing a sin every moment that you are away from Christ."

There was a moment's silence, then said Ralph Hill, who hitherto had said very little, "Don't you think your soul is worth saving, Will?"

"Yes! for if what you said a moment ago is true, my soul is worth more than the whole world."

"No matter in whatever else you may succeed," said George, "if you fail in this, your life will be a miserable failure; no matter in whatever else you fail, if you succeed in this, your life will be a success."

"No doubt," said Will, "I ought to be a Christian, but it is an awful hard thing to be a Christian."

"Oh, no! you are mistaken," said Bert Moore. "It is the way of the transgressor that is hard. The path of the just is as a shining light that shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

"Well, I guess it is no use for me to try to talk to you fellows, for I can't dispute scripture with you; and I would not if I could; but it does seem to me the hardest thing in the world would be to lead a Christian life."

"It is," said George, "if you are going to be a half-hearted Christian. If you are going to see how little a Christian you can be, instead of how big a Christian you can be; if you are going to see how little you can do for the Savior, instead of how much you can do for Him; if you are going to see how far off you can follow, instead of how closely you can follow; then it will be a very hard thing for you, or any one else, to lead a Christian life."

"I guess you are right," answered Will.

"You can't serve God and Mammon and have any joy in serving God. It is a good deal harder to serve Satan than it is to serve the Savior. To serve the Savior is liberty, to serve Satan is slavery. The service of the Savior means a reward in heaven, the service of Satan means the pangs of hell. To serve the Savior means joy and peace, to serve Satan means woe and despair."

"You have heard the story of the cruel tyrant, haven't you, Will?"

"No, I haven't, George. What is it?"

"A certain tyrant called unto him one of his subjects and said unto him, 'What is your occupation, sir?' 'My occupation is blacksmithing,' replied the subject. 'Go make me a chain five feet long,' said the tyrant. The subject went and labored hard, making the chain five feet long, and when he had completed it he brought it to the tyrant. The tyrant looked at it a moment and then said, 'It is not long enough; go make it ten times that long.' The subject went, and labored long and hard making the chain ten times that long, and when he had completed it he took it to the tyrant, expecting a reward for his labor. The tyrant looked at him for a moment and then said to his servants, 'Take that chain and bind him and cast him into prison.' Is not that a pretty good illustration of the service of the devil?" asked George.

"Yes, but I am not serving Satan like that," answered Will.

"I don't know how you are serving him, but if you are not serving the Savior then you are serving Satan. 'He that is not with me is against me.' If you are not on the Savior's side, you are on Satan's side. If you are not letting your life tell for Christ, then you are letting

it tell against him. If you are doing Satan's will, then you can not expect the Savior's love. 'He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven; but he that denieth me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.' Oh, Will, there is no hope for them in eternity who are against the Son of God in time. If you do not stand by Him now He will not stand by you then. If you do not accept Him now, how can He accept you then? It is said that 'Christ was a friend of sinners,' but woe be to the sinners who become not friends of Christ. It is said that the Son of God was delivered into the hands of sinners, but woe be to the sinners when they shall be delivered into the hands of the Son of God. You may not be a great sinner, but we will be judged not only for being abominable sinners, but also for being unprofitable servants; not only for being against Christ, but also for not being with Christ."

"Oh, but," said Will, "I am a great sinner; so great that I am afraid He would not receive me if I would come to Him."

"There is something that I am more afraid of than that," said George.

"What is that?" asked Will.

"That you will not feel yourself a sinner at all. There is often more hope of the great sinner

than there is of the little sinner. That man who feels himself a very great sinner is not far from the kingdom, but that man who deems himself a very little sinner is yet a great way off. You can not feel yourself too great a sinner to be saved, but you may deem yourself such a little sinner that you do not feel your need of a Savior. There is no sin so great but what God will forgive it if you repent of it, but you may deem your sin so little that you do not think it necessary to be forgiven for it. The Savior never had anything but words of comfort for that one who was borne down with sin, but he never had anything but words of condemnation to the self-righteous who felt that they were not very great sinners. 'He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.' 'This is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.' This was spoken by Paul. When first we hear of him his hands were stained with blood. But he repented of his sin and the Lord forgave him. The question, Will, is not whether he will forgive you, but whether you are willing to forsake your sin and turn to God and be forgiven for your sin. I am sure that if you are willing to forsake your sin, that He is standing ready and willing to forgive you and your sin, for He says, 'Let the wicked forsake his way,

and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' "

" But, George, I can't give up my sin."

" Don't say you can't, but say you won't. There are many things that I do not know, but there is one thing I do know, and that is, that a man can give up every sin that he wants to give up. God will help you give up every sin that you want to give up and are willing to give up. But, if you are not willing to give it up, God himself can not take it away from you. There is sufficient grace to help you give up every sin, and if you will fully appropriate the grace of God, you can give up every sin. You say you can't give up your sin; I am more afraid you do not want to give up your sin."

" I guess that is it," replied Will, in a sort of compromising manner.

" Well, are you going to remain unwilling to give up your sin, and are you going on in your impenitence, and are you going to be damned at last ?"

" Well, George, if I am damned, that's my business."

" Sure. And I am trying to have you attend to that all-important business of being forgiven and reconciled to God, for it is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

“ Why, George, you make out God an awful being. I believe he is a God of Love.”

“ Yes, I believe, too, that he is a God of love, and what a burning shame it is that you, by your willful continuance in sin, will grieve that love. He sent His Son into the world to die upon the cruel cross to redeem you from sin, and what worse stab could you give His heart of love than to refuse to give up sin? Why, Will, if you knew the love of God, it would break that hard heart of yours. If you knew the love of God you could not abide another moment in sin. The goodness of God ought to lead you to repentance, and if it does not lead you to repentance, then you know nothing of the goodness of God. If you know the love of God, and will not forsake your sin, then you are mocking the love of God.”

“ But, George, don't you believe that God is merciful? ”

“ Yes, indeed. But I believe that He is also just. If He is not just then His mercy to the ungodly would be a great injustice to the godly. But the Bible says, ‘ His mercy is to them that fear Him.’ What good is the mercy of God to you when you will spurn all His mercy? Why do you expect God to have mercy upon you, when you do not have mercy upon yourself? Will, if you knew the love of God, which you speak of, and then will not forsake your sin which is grieving

that love, then the condemnation upon you is all the greater. God is a just God. He is a merciful God. He is a holy God. Your sin to Him is heinous. It vexes Him. It worries Him. It troubles Him. It grieves Him. How long will you vex Him? How long will you grieve Him? How long will you worry Him? He desires you to turn from your sin. He invites. He pleads. He reasons. He persuades. He warns. He threatens. He raises His awful hand to heaven and swears 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'

"If you really felt that you were a sinner, and believed 'that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,' you would no longer grieve that God of Love by still remaining in sin, would you?" asked George, very earnestly.

"I don't know," replied Will in a way as if he knew not what else to say.

"Do you think, Will, that as you stand before the judgment bar of Christ to give account of the deeds done in the body, that you will have much consolation in the fact that you held out so long against God, and that you grieved His love so long by your sin? I am sure that if you knew the love of God that you could give up your sin. Yea, more, you *would* give up your sin.

Now, be honest, Will, don't you think you would be a good deal happier if you would just give up your sin and come right straight to God and accept Christ as your Savior?"

"I don't see how I can; it is an awful step to take."

"It is an awful step to take!" said George in astonishment. "It is a thousand times more awful not to take it. I don't see how you can help but do it. Instead of saying 'I can't, I can't,' it seems to me you would cry out, 'Oh God, help, I must, I must.'"

There was a moment of oppressive silence. No one seemed to want to speak. Finally George asked: "Is there anything in your way?"

"No!" replied he, in a more solemn manner than usual. "If I knew I would hold out I would think something about being a Christian, but I do not want to begin and then make a failure of it."

"You are afraid that you can't hold out! I am more afraid that you will never start out. I am sure you never will hold out if you never start out. How are you going to know that you can't hold out if you will never start out?"

"Well, there is no use talking, I do not want to begin a Christian life and then not be able to live it."

"I am glad you have that feeling about it, Will. It is the strongest indication in the world that you will hold out if you will only lay hold on the grace of God. That one who feels his own weakness and then lays hold upon God's strength will not fail. If you thought that you could hold out in your own strength I would not urge you, for then I would know that you would make a miserable failure. I am sure that you can not hold out. God alone can keep you, and He has promised to do so if you will only trust Him. In the face of His promises that He will keep you and uphold you and strengthen you and encourage you, what makes you think that you can not hold out? Can you not take God at His Word?"

"You would not respect me yourself, George, if I started out and then made a miserable failure of it."

"You do not want to think of making a failure of it. If you start out half-hearted you are sure to fail."

"Well, I haven't much respect for these people who are always getting converted and then go back."

"I haven't, either. But there is no need of them going back. But, Will, I have more respect for that man or woman who starts out with the earnest desire to hold out, than for that one who

is too trifling even to start out. I have more respect for that young man who starts out in life with the earnest desire to succeed, though he may fail, than for that young man who has not even ambition enough to make an effort to succeed. I respect that young man who starts to school with an earnest endeavor to gain an education, though he may fail, than that worthless, idle fellow who has no ambition even to get an education. And I believe that God will have more compassion on that man at the day of judgment, who has made an honest, sincere effort to do His will, than for that trifling one who cares nothing for His will.

"I am sure the Lord will keep you just in so far as you will trust Him. If you trust Him completely, He will keep you completely. If you will commit your entire self to God He will keep you. Paul can testify to that for he said, 'For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'

"I am sure that Ralph can testify to the fact that there is no need of us trying to stand alone."

"Yes, indeed, I can," said Ralph. "I had the same idea of being a Christian that you have; I thought that I had to do it in my own strength. I strove, and struggled, and fought, and tried to

be a Christian until I had worn myself entirely out, and then I gave up, and for several years lived a miserable backslider, and even spurned the name of Christian; all because I had the wrong idea of what it was to be a Christian, or rather because I had no idea save that I thought that it was some sort of a feeling that I once had, and then was soon gone. But I thank the Lord that I now have some promises to stand upon. Since George convinced me from the Bible, that the Christian life is not a life of striving or struggling, but a life of trusting, I have found it to be a life of great joy and happiness."

"Yes," said Bert Moore; "I have never been a backslider, but I can testify that it is a blessed thing to trust the Savior to save you and keep you."

"I am sure," said George to Will, "that you would take such a faithful testimony from Ralph and Bert concerning other questions, why will you not take their testimony concerning this important question? I am sure they have no desire in their heart to deceive you."

"I do not doubt but what they say is true; but as for myself, I am afraid to risk it."

"There is no risk about it, if you will just throw yourself over onto the Lord and implicitly trust Him. Can you not trust Him?"

"Yes, I can trust Him, but I can not trust myself."

"That's good; you do not want to trust yourself, for then you would fall sure. You must look away from self to Christ. Now, can't you just lay aside your own strength, and implicitly trust the Savior?"

"I wish I could, but it seems so hard to do."

"Well, just take the first step right now. Surrender to God. Say, 'Oh, Savior, the way is dark, but I will trust Thee to lead me. Do Thou save me and keep me.' And as you say it just do it."

"Oh, I wish I could; but I can't."

"Why can't you?" asked George, pleadingly.

"Just give up your own will," said Bert Moore, "and I am sure you can."

Will arose to his feet and said: "I guess that's what's the matter with me—I'm too stubborn." And as he said it he walked away toward the tent. George hastily arose and followed him, and taking him by the arm said, with tears in his eyes, "Will, can't you give up?"

Will shook his head very emphatically as he said, "No!"

"Will you promise me, then," said George, "that you will pray over the matter, that God may help you to a decision to lead a Christian life and fully trust Christ to keep you?"

Will stopped for a moment and hesitated, and then said, "Yes, I will promise you that."

He went up into the tent and laid down upon his couch with his arms over his eyes. George went back to where the other boys were—Ralph and Bert—where they talked over, very seriously, the matter of Will Long's salvation, for George was afraid that he was grieving the Holy Spirit, which was striving with him.

"Let's go down behind the hill and pray for him," said Bert Moore.

"All right," said the other two boys, as they rose to go.

They had a season of prayer and then again talked very seriously concerning Will.

As Will lay upon his couch in the tent he was very much wrought up. The crisis of his life had come. The Lord, by His Spirit, was very emphatically saying to him, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve."

The time for the noon hour had come, but no one seemed to realize it but Emmett Windom and Frank Basil, who had gone up the river and were now returning. They went into the tent and noticed that Will Long was very sober, and that he was struggling to keep back the tears which glistened in his eyes.

"What is the matter, Will?" asked Frank Basil.

"Oh, nothing," replied Will, his voice tremulous with emotion.

"I suppose he is getting converted, too," sarcastically said Emmett Windom.

"Yes, I am," said Will, very emphatically, and with an emphasis that gave Emmett to understand that he did not care for his sarcasm.

"That's right," said Frank Basil. "I am sure that it will not hurt any one to become a Christian. It is just what every one ought to do."

"The Lord must be in this camp, sure," wittingly said Emmett. "I am almost afraid that I will get converted myself."

"I am sure it will not hurt you," replied Will Long.

From the foot of the hill where the boys had been praying George Axtell, as he arose to his feet, saw that Emmett and Frank had returned and were up in the tent. No sooner did he see it than he said, "Boys, those other fellows are up there in the tent, and if Will has any serious thoughts of becoming a Christian, Emmett will try and laugh it out of him. We had better go up there."

Immediately the boys arose and followed George, who had started for the tent. As George stepped in at the door of the tent Will was sitting on the edge of his couch with the tears which he had shed still hanging on his cheeks, but there was a heavenly smile on his face.

"George," said he, "I have decided it."

"Praise the Lord," replied George.

Bert Moore and Ralph Hill threw their arms around him and embraced him for joy.

"Let's sing 'Happy Day,' " said George.

They began to sing, and they sung it with a feeling indescribable. Frank Basil seemed to enjoy it, but Emmett Windom left the tent in disgust.

"George, when I promised you that I would pray concerning this matter, I did not have any idea that I would ever be a Christian, though I knew that I ought to be. But when I laid down on the couch a strange thought took hold of me and I felt that if I was not saved, perhaps then I never would be saved."

"We were afraid of that, too," said George, "and went down behind the hill and earnestly prayed that you might not grieve the Spirit."

"It is hard to fight against the Lord," said Bert Moore.

"Yes, indeed it is, Bert, and I am glad that I have given up and yielded to Him."

"So are we," said George, "and I am sure that if you will just keep on trusting the Lord completely, your Christian life will be a glorious one."

CHAPTER VIII.

Since the boys had gone into camp, one week had passed, then two, and almost three. The time for George Axtell's stay in the camp was almost gone. The three weeks allotted him for a vacation had rapidly passed away. A few days more and he would have to return to the store and again resume his work. The thought of going back without seeing Frank and Emmett converted weighed heavily upon his soul. Bert Moore, Ralph Hill and Will Long had all accepted the Savior. In this he was greatly rejoicing; but when he thought of Frank Basil and Emmett Windom, and their seeming indifference and hardness, his heart almost sank within him.

"There is Frank Basil," he would say to himself, "there is some hope of him becoming a Christian, because he is honest, I believe, in his doubts. But there is Emmett Windom, he has trifled and trifled, I fear, too long. He is inclined to sneer at everything religious. Unless the Lord convicts him mightily of sin, I fear there will be no hope for him. But, moreover," he thought to himself, "why should the Lord convict him? He would only harden himself against

it. God is not going to convict him, so long as it will only harden him more and more against Him. It would only be adding condemnation to him to convict him of sin, when he is not willing to forsake his sin.

"Well," said George, "all that I can do is to try and lead them to the Savior. I do not want the blame of their condemnation resting upon me. It seems almost useless to speak to them, and especially Emmett, but it will not be so terrible to see him lost after I had spoken to him, as to see him lost without having spoken to him. If he ever goes to hell it will be in the face of entreaty and warning. My Heavenly Father shall never require his blood at my hands if he will give me an opportunity to speak to him."

It was a very warm Thursday afternoon. Ralph, Will and George were out in the woods reclining in the shade of a tree. They were talking about the good time they had, and about the new joys they had found.

"So you are going home Saturday, George," said Will Long.

"Yes," said George. "My time will be up Saturday, and I will be compelled to return and begin work."

"Well," said Ralph, "we have had a blessed good time together. I am sure, I am sorry to see you go."

"Yes," said Will. "I do not know what we will do when you leave."

"I am sure," replied George, "that you are no more sorry than I am. And it almost breaks my heart to think of going back without seeing Frank and Emmett converted."

"I am afraid that you will be compelled to do so," said Will Long, "for they seem almost to be hopeless cases, and especially Emmett."

"Well, I will do all that I can to bring them to Christ, and if they are lost, their blood shall not be on my hands."

"Are you going to speak to them about it," asked Ralph.

"If the Lord gives me an opportunity, I will."

"I am afraid that you will not get an opportunity, for they are as shy as an old fox when pursued."

"That is true; but if the Lord wants me to speak to them he will open the way."

"I wish we might be able to lead them to the Savior," said Ralph, in a manner as if he were sympathizing with George.

Frank Basil, Emmett Windom and Bert Moore remained in the tent after dinner and did not go out in the woods. From where the other boys were sitting they could see that the boys in the tent were earnestly engaged in a conversation—they were gesturing as if they were in a heated argument.

Bert Moore, who remained in the tent with Frank and Emmett, got into a heated argument with them. He held his own against them for a while, but two against one was too much for him, so he said, "Well, I will go over and get George; he will argue with you."

"No," said Emmett, "he won't argue, he will just quote scripture."

Bert arose, left the tent, and went out to where the boys were sitting. As he approached them he said, "George, I have been having an argument with the boys and they were too much for me. They just ridiculed everything I said. I wish you would go over and talk to them."

"What were they arguing about?" asked George.

"Why, religion, of course."

"How can they argue religion when they haven't any?" asked George.

"You go over and you will find out," replied Bert.

"All right, I will go over; this may be the opportunity, and the only opportunity, that I will have of speaking to them about their own souls' salvation."

As he walked toward the tent he prayed that the Lord might give him wisdom, and that he might have access to the hearts of the boys.

As he approached the tent Frank Basil said,

"George, we have been having a hot debate with Bert. I guess we got the better of him. He didn't seem to help us any in our difficulty, and I am glad that you have come. I am sure that you can give us some light on the subject."

"I don't know whether I can or not," replied George. "It depends what you were debating about and what the Bible says on the subject."

"Oh, we know," said Frank, "what the Bible says on the subject, but you know that we do not believe the Bible."

"What if some did not believe," said George, "'shall the unbelief of some make the faith of God of none effect?' Because you do not believe the Bible is no proof that it is not true. 'Let God be true and every man a liar.' And God is true, though every man would be a liar. If man's foolish notions and shallow opinions would destroy the truth of God's Word, then it would not be the Word of God. A blind man who had never seen the light might say there was no light. A deaf man who had never heard any sound might say there is no sound. For an unbelieving man to say, 'the Bible is not true,' does not destroy the truth of the Bible. When I was a boy I did not believe that the earth moved, and I used to spend the noon hour in school trying to persuade my teacher that the earth did not move. But I imagine the earth moved all the same, whether I

believed it or not. And whether you believe the Bible or not, that does not make any difference in the truth of it.

"I know that," replied Frank, "but when a man can't believe the Bible, what is he going to do about it, I would like to know?"

"The trouble with you is not that you can't believe, but it is because you won't believe. If you tried as hard to be Christian as you try to be an infidel, you would not very long be an infidel. If you sought as hard for the light as you try to close your eyes against the light, I am sure that you would find the light. If you tried as hard to go to heaven as you try to go to hell, it would not be very long until you would be on your way to heaven."

"But, George, if a man has intellectual difficulties, and can't believe certain things in the Bible, how is he going to help it?"

"Frank, the trouble is not with your head, it is with your heart. You get your heart all right, and your head will be all right. Clean up your heart, and that will clear up your head. It is not the Bible that is wrong, it is you that is wrong. You get right, and then the Bible will be all right. Sin in the heart makes the Bible an exceeding mysterious book. It won't do to read the Bible through the devil's spectacles."

"Do you mean to say, George, that my skeptical head is due to my sinful heart?"

"That is what I mean," pleasantly replied George.

"I do not know that I have such a sinful heart," replied Frank, flushing up a little.

"It may not be the sin of drunkenness, or of lust, or of murder, but it is some sin, perhaps of pride, or selfishness, or rebellion; it may be the sin of indifference, or hard-heartedness, or self-righteousness, but it is sin."

Emmett Windom quickly rose to his feet, and in a defiant way said, "I don't know what you will do, Frank; but he could not talk to me like that," and he went out underneath the trees with the other boys.

Frank Basil seemed to be somewhat offended at the truth that George had put at him, but he made no reply to Emmett's remark.

Finally George said, "Frank, I am sorry that I have offended you. Emmett does not like me very well, and he has mistaken my meaning. I am sure what I have said I have spoken out of love to you, and if you knew how I have been yearning for your salvation, I am sure that you would think so."

"I am much obliged to you, George, for your interest, and if it were not for the difficulties in the way, I think I would be a Christian. I said to Emmett the other day, 'If I could believe honestly, as a Christian ought to believe, there is

no doubt but that I would be a Christian. But when a man has honest doubts, and can not conscientiously believe that way, what is he going to do?"

"There is but one thing that he can do," replied George.

"And what is that?"

"Give your heart to the Lord and completely surrender to Him."

"That expression, 'give your heart to the Lord,' is the most nonsensical thing to me in all the world. Giving your heart to the Lord, I am sure I do not know what it means."

"It is the simplest thing in the world, Frank."

"Well, just tell me plainly what it means."

"It means simply this, to turn your entire nature over to him, that he may do with it as he pleases; it is entirely surrendering to the Lord, and saying, 'Here, Lord, take me as I am, and make me what thou wouldst have me be. I am willing to be what thou wouldst have me be, I am willing to do what thou wouldst have me do, I am willing to go where thou wouldst have me go.' "

"That is a very hard thing to do."

"Yes! But if you will but make the surrender, I am sure the Lord will lead you out into the light. If you will give him your heart, it will not be long until he will clear up your head. If

you will entirely surrender to Him, if you are wrong, he will set you right."

"Well, if I am wrong, I am sure I want to be right. And if I am wrong I do not see why the Lord does not set me right."

"How can He set you right, if you will not surrender to Him? How can He give you a new heart, if you will not give Him your old heart? How can He change your nature if you forever bar your nature against Him? God himself can not change you one bit if you do not surrender to Him."

"Why, George, I thought that God was almighty and could do all things."

"God is almighty, but He can not do things inconsistent with His nature. God is just, He is holy, and He can not do an unjust act or commit an unholy deed."

"How do you know?"

"Why, God would no longer be just or holy if He did one unjust thing or committed one unholy deed. The Bible says: 'He can not lie.' If man has a free will God can not destroy that free will, for then he would no longer have a free will. Unless you surrender your will to God, He can not make you one whit better than you are. I am sure if you were willing to do God's will, that He would reveal to you His will."

"Why does not the Lord reveal himself to me any way?"

"Why, He knows better than that."

"What do you mean?"

"He does not want to tell you something, when he knows that you are not willing to do it. He would only be adding condemnation to you if He did. But to every obedient soul who is willing to do His will, to them He will reveal His will. A man may be spiritually blind, yet if he completely surrenders to God he shall see. He may be spiritually deaf, yet if he is willing to hear, He will unstop his deaf ear."

"I suppose there is where the trouble is with me, George, I am not willing to surrender to Him."

"That's for you to do. If you do surrender, I am sure that these difficulties will all be cleared up; if you do not surrender, I am afraid you will go on in your doubt, and die in impenitence and be lost at last."

Frank made no reply but seemed to be in deep meditation. After a moment's pause, George said to him, "We have forgotten all about the discussion. I do not even know what it was about."

"That's so," replied Frank. "I, also, had forgotten all about it. Why, Emmett and I argued that if I did the best I could, I would be saved and Bert said that would not save any one."

"Bert was right," immediately said George.

“ Why, George, if I do the best I can, will not that save me ? ”

“ No ! ”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because you are not doing the best you can. You know much better than you do. If you know no more than you do, you are the biggest ignoramus in the world. You do very little, and if you know no more than you do, you know very little. ”

“ But, George, if I do the best I can, will not that save me ? ”

“ But you are not doing the best you can. ”

“ But if I did ? ”

“ You might as well ask, ‘ If something else had happened than what did happen, what would have happened ? ’ But even if you did the best you could, it would not save you. ”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because the best that you can do, will still come far short of saving you. The highest mark of man’s doing may not even come up to the lowest mark of God’s judging. Your efforts, however good in the sight of men, may be ever so poor in the sight of God. If man could be saved by his own doings, there would have been no need of Christ’s sufferings. ”

“ I can not believe that. ”

“ It does not matter whether you believe it or

not, that is what the Bible says about it. In Titus iii: 5, it says: 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saves us.' Then again, over here in Ephesians, the second chapter and the eighth and ninth verses it says: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.' Then again here in Acts xiii: 38, 39: 'Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified from the law of Moses.' You might as well try to keep yourself from drowning by pulling at your hair, as to try to save yourself by your own effort. A stone might as well try to lift itself from the ground as for a man to save himself."

"But if I kept the law perfectly, would not that save me?"

"But you can not keep the law perfectly, for 'By the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified,' because you can not keep the law."

"Well, George, if God knew that we could not keep that law, why, then, did he give it?"

"That we might know that we are sinners, and repent of our sin, and turn to God and be forgiven for our sin. Paul said, 'The law was given as a school master to bring us to Christ.'"

"I do not understand that," said Frank.

"The law was given to teach us that we are sinners and under condemnation, in order that we might repent and accept the great gift of salvation. Paul also said that if it had not been for the law that he would not have known sin. If the Lord had not said, 'Thou shalt not steal,' we would not have known that stealing was sin."

"Well, George, would we not have been a great deal better off if it had been so?"

"No, indeed! for then we might go on in our wrong doing and never be convicted of our sin, and never repent of it and be lost at last. I am glad that God has given us the law to convict us of sin, that we might repent of it and be saved. I am glad the law was given to tell us what is sin, that we may repent of it and be forgiven for it."

"I think, George, it is an awful thing to read the law and see how condemning it is."

"But, Frank, it is more awful not to know our sin, and go on remaining under the condemnation of it. I am glad that the law came with awful condemnation to my heart, else I would have gone on in my impenitence and sin, and would have been lost forever. But the law told me what an awful sinner I was, and how heinous my sin was in the sight of God, and it broke me down before the Lord, and I turned to Him as my Savior."

"But, George, if God would not have given the law, then there would not have been any sin."

"Oh no, Frank, you are mistaken about that. The law does not make a wrong a sin. It only tells us that it is a sin, and what a blessed thing it is that it does, in order that we may forsake it and be forgiven for it. The law was not given to save, but to condemn you. You can not be saved by the law, but you are condemned by the law. That very thing which you think will save you is just what condemns you."

"That is an awful thing to think of, George."

"Not if you will accept Christ and be saved. It is nothing to me that I am under condemnation, when there is a way of salvation. 'Where sin did abound, grace did much more abound.'"

"You do not believe in morality, then, do you, George?"

"Not as a means of salvation, but as a result of it. Morality is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It may take a man to the gate of heaven, but it will never let him in. Christ says, 'I am the door, no man cometh to the Father but by me.' Your moral life is not sufficient to save you. A moral life that would save a man, would have to be a perfect life; and there is none such out of Christ."

"But are there not some men who are seemingly all right?"

“ They may be all right on the outside, but they may be all wrong on the inside. He may be seemingly all right in his life, and be all wrong at heart. I believe there is such a thing as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. All that some men have of the sheep is the fleece, the rest is wolf. I do not think there is any one who lives a stricter moral, upright life, outwardly, than the Pharisees, and yet Christ said of these: ‘ Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye can in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ The Pharisees were seemingly all right in their life, but they were wrong at heart. ‘ Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh at the heart.’ God takes into account, not only the action of our lives, but also the condition of our hearts. He will judge us, not only from what we have done, but also by what we are. If our hearts are not right in the sight of God, it matters not what our lives have been in the sight of men. That poor Publican, weighed down with his sin, who, with a broken spirit and a contrite heart, cried out, ‘ God be merciful to me a sinner,’ was better in the sight of God, than the self-righteous Pharisee, who stood and thanked God that he was not as some other men are, and especially like that Publican. But I tell you, the Publican went down to his house justi-

fied, rather than the other, so says the Savior. Christ never spoke anything but words of comfort to those who felt that they were sinners, but he never spoke anything but words of condemnation to the self-righteous Pharisee.

“ Frank, I am sure that if we saw our hearts as God sees them that we would no longer depend upon our morality for salvation. You remember last summer when Harry Wise almost drowned, don't you ?”

“ Yes; I remember that well.”

“ You know that since then he has become an earnest Christian, don't you ?”

“ No. I had not heard that, but I know that he always was a good, straight fellow.”

“ Yes, but he told me last summer, when he came near drowning, that when he was going down the last time everything that he had ever done, every evil thought that he had ever thought, little sins that he had forgotten, went through his mind like a flash of lightning, and had he died, said he, he would have been lost. And when he came to consciousness he decided to accept Christ as his Savior. Before that he had never thought of being a Christian. For he thought that he was just about good enough, but when he saw himself as God saw him, then he realized that he would have been lost without a Savior, and he accepted Him, and is trusting Him

to-day. I think, Frank, if you could see yourself as he saw himself, that you would no longer depend upon your morality."

"I do not know about that, but I do know that Wise was regarded one of the best and most moral young men in the town, and if he would have been lost, I do not see how there can be much chance for me. But I do not see why a moral man should not be saved."

"Because morality is not a condition of salvation, and if it were none could be saved, for no man's morality is good enough to save him. 'For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;' and the moral man will need pardon for his sin as well as any other one who has sinned; and there is no pardon outside the merits of Christ's death on the cross, and if he does not trust to this there can be no hope for him. To be saved is not by what we have done or can do, but by faith appropriating what Christ has done. The condition of salvation is such that every one can meet it if they want to do so. If it were works, or morality, we could not meet it. What a blessing it is that God did make the condition of salvation such that we can all meet it—faith in the merits of Christ's death upon the cross. I do not see why any one should object to God's way of salvation, when it is the easiest, the simplest and the only way. If a man wants to lead

a moral life I am sure that accepting Christ will not keep him from it, but it will help him to lead a moral life."

"But, George, don't you think that if a man is a moral man that he is nearer the kingdom of heaven than an immoral man?"

"I doubt it, Frank. I think Christ told the truth when he said that the 'publicans and harlots shall go into the kingdom of heaven before the self-righteous Pharisees.' These feel the need of a Savior and will accept him when he is offered to them, but the Pharisees feel no need of a Savior. You remember the self-righteous scribe to whom Christ said, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven.' We have no assurance that he ever got into the kingdom of heaven. I hardly think he did, for he thought that he was already in, while he was not. The danger is that there are some who get so near the kingdom that they vainly imagine that they are on the inside of the kingdom when they are still on the outside of it. It is a sad thing when a man thinks he is about good enough to be saved and then in the end is lost.

"It is a sad thing when a man gets so near the kingdom that he lacks just one thing, like the rich young ruler, and then will let that keep him out forever. It is a sad thing when a man, because of morality, deceives his own soul. No

matter how near the kingdom of heaven a man may be, it avails nothing if he is not in it. It matters not how near the City of Refuge the pursued one has come, he is not safe until he is within its walls. It would not have mattered how near Noah might have come to the ark, there was no safety anywhere outside of it. No matter how near a moral man gets to the kingdom of heaven if he does not get into it."

"You do not think that all these moral men are going to be lost, do you?"

"Well, if there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus, and they will despise that name, then I do not see how they are going to be saved. The Apostle Paul said, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' He did not answer that question. No one else ever answered. No one ever can answer. There is no escape if we neglect so great salvation."

"Do you think, George, that all these will go to hell?"

"If they won't get to heaven, I am sure I do not know where else they will go."

"That is one thing that staggers me and it always did."

"What staggers you, Frank?"

"Why, I can not believe there is a hell."

"Do you believe there is a heaven?"

“Why, certainly I do.”

“Well, you be sure you get to heaven, and never mind hell. If everybody would make sure of heaven, there would not be any hell, or it would be empty if there was one. But where will these go, who will not go to heaven? A man who is sure of heaven does not need to fear hell. If I had no more hope of heaven than some men have, I believe I would not like to believe in hell either. When a man objects to hell, then I begin to think he is afraid of going there.”

“Do you really believe in a hell, George?”

“If I believe in a heaven, I must believe in a hell. If there is any reward there must be punishment. If God is just, there must be punishment, if there is any reward. There must be a heaven if there is a hell.”

“But you do not believe in a hell of fire and brimstone, do you?”

“I believe in something as awful as that.”

“Don’t you think that those are figurative expressions?”

“What if they are, they prefigure something real. As the fact of death is more awful than anything that has been used to prefigure it, or can be used to represent it, so I would not be surprised if the facts of hell are as awful, or more awful than anything that has been used to represent it.”

“Can you believe that God is a God of love, and then will cast men into such a hell as that?”

“He will not cast men in—they wilfully go there themselves. He has done all that he can do to keep them from going there. He has provided a way of escape at an infinite cost, but if they reject all his mercy how can they escape? He has invited; he has plead; he has warned; what more can he do? If men go to hell, they go there of their own accord, and that in the face of the love, mercy, entreaty and warnings of God.”

“Do you think that God is a God of love, and then will provide such a hell where offending sinners will go?”

“God did not provide it. Men make it for themselves. There will not be one bitter drop in the impenitent sinner’s cup of woe, but what he has put there himself. There will not be a pang of conscience, or one wailing cry, or one hot tear, but what the lost sinner will have brought upon himself. I believe, that ‘whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ He will reap in eternity what he has sown in time.”

“Well, that would not make such an awful hell for a man, if he only reaps what he has sown.”

“It won’t? Do you know what will be the punishment of the drunkard? It will be a grind-

ing, consuming, burning thirst for rum, and not be able to get it. No doubt there will be rum maniacs in hell, crying, 'Give me rum! Give me rum! I must have rum!' What worse punishment could there be to the drunkard, than to have a 'delirium tremen,' whose spell could never be broken. You remember when old John Wilkinson died, it took six men to hold him; and then he dragged them about the room as if they were mere straws. He thought that hideous monsters were entwining themselves about him; he thought that frightful serpents were shooting their forked tongues in his face; he imagined that flames of fire were leaping down his throat. Talk about fire in hell; there will be no more real fire in hell than that which old Wilkinson imagined leaping down his throat; there will never be any monsters in the pit more horrible and hideous than what he thought were entwining themselves about him. To him they were as real as any fire that ever burned, or any monsters that ever lived."

"And that's your idea of hell?"

"Why not? 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Just take a man like Wilkinson, and translate him, in the condition in which he died, over into eternity, and what worse hell could there be?"

"And do you think that that will be his condition in eternity?"

“Why not? ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.’ ”

“Well, according to your notion, what will be the punishment of the murderer?”

“Like Cain; he will be forever hearing his brother’s blood crying to him from the ground. The murderer sees the murdered man’s ghost.”

“What will be the punishment of the sin of impurity and lust?”

“You will but need to go to Blackwell’s Island and see. It is a veritable hell on earth. But what will that hell be, when sin is finished? Do you want to know what the punishment will be of the man or woman who has rejected Christ?”

“Yes; what will it be?”

“They will then realize their awful mistake and their awful sin, the greatest sin. Christ said that he would send His spirit into the world to convince the world of sin, and he mentions but one sin, ‘Because they believe not on me,’ as if that were the greatest sin, and it is. They will forever have to look on him whom they have pierced. They will then realize the love they have spurned, the heart they have broken, the mercy they have despised. For these the awful pang will be, not only what they must endure, but what they might have enjoyed. Not only what they are punished for, but what they might

have been rewarded for. The awful remorse for them will be the thought of what might have been. For a man to reject Jesus Christ for anything else is an act of Judas Iscariot who set Him aside for thirty pieces of silver, and like him I think they will forever feel like hanging themselves."

"Do you think that God is a God of love and will ever let a human soul go to a place like that?"

"How can he help it when men are determined to go there? He has done all that he can do to prevent them from going there; and if ever a man goes to hell it will have to be over the loving sacrifices of Jesus Christ and against the warnings of Almighty God. To-day he is crying, as he did of old, 'Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?' If ever a man is lost it will be in spite of the invitations, pleadings, warnings, threatenings of God. If ever a man goes to hell, it will be over the love of God. 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,' and if they ever perish, it will be in spite of His matchless love. He has offered salvation free to us at an infinite cost to Himself. 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?'"

"Well, George, if that is the way that you believe, all right, but I can never believe that way."

"How do you believe?"

“ I believe that a man gets all his punishment in this world.”

“ Gets all his punishment in this world!” said George, in astonishment. “ How can a man get all his punishment in this world, when sometimes the last thing he does before he goes out of this world is to commit some great sin. Where is there time for punishment in this world for the man, who upon the gallows curses God because justice was meted out to him? Where is there time in this world for punishment for the man, who, because of malice or jealousy in his heart, takes the life of his fellow-man, and then because of remorse takes his own. You remember last winter, John Reed came home ‘crazy drunk,’ beat his wife cruelly, turned her and his own children out in the cold streets, so that one of them took sick from the effects of it and died? The next morning John was found dead in bed himself. Where was there time for punishment in this world for him?”

“ But does not their conscience punish them?”

“ Why, Frank, some men haven’t any conscience. ‘It is seared as with a red hot iron.’ Your argument will not hold; for the ungodlier a man gets the less his conscience hurts him. It ought to punish them more, but it seems to hurt them less. There are some men whose sins are so great, that though their conscience were a

scourge, and every pang a lash, it would not atone for the sin of some men. If man gets all his punishment in this world, then why is it that some of the worst get the least? No, no! He lets the wheat and tares grow together until the harvest, then comes the separation, so He lets the righteous and the wicked go together until the end of the world, then come the rewards and the punishments."

"Yes, but George, you do not know how much their conscience troubles them."

"No! But this I do know, the longer they go on in sin, the less it troubles them; and the ungodlier they get, the less their conscience hurts them."

"Well, George, if a man does not get his punishment in this world, there is one thing I am sure of."

"What is that?"

"Why, that man will have another chance after death."

"How did you get all those foolish notions in your head, Frank?"

"Oh, I have picked them up here and there."

"You must have been looking for them."

"Well, I must confess that I have; and as you said the other day, if I had been looking as closely for the truth as I have been looking for these things, I think I would be better off."

“ I declare, Frank, I can understand a good many things, but how some men go about looking for something over which they might stumble into hell, I do not understand. I was talking to a very hard hearted man some time ago about becoming a Christian, and it seemed as if he wrested every passage of scripture in the Bible from its true meaning, that he might have an excuse for going to hell. I said to him, ‘ Why do you search the whole Bible for a verse over which you seem determined to stumble down into hell, when the Bible is full of hopeful promises and blessed invitations to you ? ’ He seemed at first at a loss what to say, and then he said, ‘ I guess it’s because I am bound to go to hell. ’ There are many men who seem to be just that foolish, Frank.”

Frank seemed at a loss what to reply to these thrusts, and seemed somewhat worried, so he made no reply to what George had said.

After a short pause George said, “ Do you really think that you will have another chance after death ? ”

“ I hardly think I would have said so, if I did not think so.”

“ Why do you want another chance after death, Frank ? Is the service of Satan so sweet that you must take all of this life for serving him, and then expect God to save you in the life to

come? If mercy on earth will not bring you to repentance, neither will justice in hell do it. If God's great love here will not lead you to repentance, neither will God's justice there do it. Instead of becoming penitent, you will become hardened. 'Character tends to permanency.' The farther you will go on in sin the less desire you will have to forsake that sin. If you will not repent here where you are only partially contaminated, why do you think that you will repent there where you will be thoroughly hardened? The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay, and the love that now ought to win you, may then harden you. The older men get the harder it will be for them to become Christians. Very few are converted after the age of fifty; I have never seen but five. If the chances are so few in old age, what will they be in eternity, when age has rolled on age, and the hardness has multiplied? If the chances are so few when you are old, had you not better accept Him while you are young; if they decrease so rapidly, had you not better accept Him immediately?"

Frank seemed to be seriously thinking, but he made no reply.

Finally George said, "What makes you think that you will have another chance after death?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Frank.

"I am sure you do not get it from the Bible."

"I scarcely know what is in the Bible."

“ The Savior’s words concerning this question are very plain. I might quote you a great many; but it seems to me that the parable of Lazarus and the rich man ought to settle it forever in the mind of any one. They are not the words of a philosopher, or a theologian, but they are the words of the Son of God; and I would receive his testimony in preference of all the testimony of the world beside. You remember the parable, don’t you ?

“ ‘ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments; and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But, Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, but thou art tormented: and besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf *fixed*; so that they which would pass from

hence to you can not; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.' ”

“ I do not see how that disproves a chance after death, George.”

“ You don't? Did they not both die; was not one in heaven and the other in hell; was there not an impassable gulf FIXED so that they could not cross over? What does it prove, if it does not prove that? If there was no hope for this rich man after death, why do you think there is for any one else? He was not a wicked man as we regard wickedness, he was only stingy; but now he was reaping what he had sown; but with the seed multiplied a hundred fold, or more; and what he reaps he sows again, until, like the raging waves of the sea. ‘He has foamed out his own shame.’

“ According to that, there is not much of a chance after death, is there? ”

“ No! and if I were you, Frank, I would improve the first possible opportunity here to be a Christian, even if there were another chance in the ages after death. I do not see what you expect to gain by putting it off. If you want to go to hell and be punished awhile for your sin and then repent, why all right, but I should think that you would want to escape hell entirely; and especially when there is no opportunity of repentance offered there.”

"There is no doubt but what that would be the sensible thing to do, but I can not decide now."

"But, Frank, you are deciding now."

"I don't see how. What do you mean?"

"Why, Frank, you are deciding not to become a Christian. So long as you do not decide for Him, you are deciding against Him. Will you not right now decide for Him?"

"No, I guess not."

"Why not?"

"Well, I suppose it is as you say, that I am not willing."

"Are you willing to be made willing?"

"I think I am."

"Well, then, will you just kneel down here with me and pray that God might lead you into the light?"

"I surely ought to be willing to do that, if I am sincere, and I think I am."

They both knelt down and George prayed for Frank, as he alone can pray, and when he had finished he asked Frank whether he would not pray for himself. Frank shook his head very defiantly. They arose from their knees, and George saw tears in Frank's eyes and he was yet very hopeful of Frank's conversion; but at the time he would not yield to the conviction of his own heart. But he promised George that he would make the matter a subject of earnest

prayer, though he scarcely knew how to pray. They separated. George was exceedingly sorry that Frank did not yield; but in his heart there was the assurance which was born of his faith that Frank would some day, and, perhaps very soon, be a Christian.

CHAPTER IX.

When Emmett Windom left George Axtell and Frank Basil in anger and disgust, he went out underneath the trees where the other boys were, and there he was soon engaged in ridiculing religious things as usual. But there were three against him, and they made him cower down underneath the rebukes which they gave him. Though they had been Christians but a short time, yet by their earnestness, they would frequently bring him to seriousness. It was very difficult to talk to him about religious things; for he would just jump about here and there, now seemingly talking in earnest, and then in the most ridiculous jest; now flying up in anger, and then turning everything sacred into ridiculous jokes. He did not seem to have the dislike for the other boys which he had for George, though he did not like converted folks. They could talk to him about religion when George could not, perhaps, because he could trifle with the boys, and he could not with George.

While they were talking, George, who had left Frank in the tent after he had finished talking with him, was coming out to where the boys

were. When they saw him coming, Will Long said, "There comes George; I suppose Emmett will leave us now, as he can not bear to be around where George is."

"I am going to stay right here," said Emmett, "if he converts me. I am not afraid of him."

"I do not see why you should be," said Bert Moore; "I am sure he won't hurt you. He is much concerned about you, and yearns to see you saved."

"It will be a cold day when he sees me saved."

"I don't think it is anything to boast of," said Bert, "that you can, and do, resist all his earnest entreaties for your own welfare; when it is nothing to him whether you go to hell or not, only that he loves you."

"Well, I know George is serious, and no doubt he is concerned about me, else he would not take my rebuffs the way he has done; but I wish he would keep his religion to himself."

"Why, Emmett, I am sure his religion will not hurt you. I think it would do you some good if you had some of his religion."

"Well, I can tell you right now that I do not want any of it."

"Some day you may talk differently," said Ralph Hill.

"Yes!" said Will Long, "when he comes

face to face with eternity, I think he will look at this matter a little more seriously than he is doing now."

"I am not bothering myself very much about eternity," said Emmett, in a very trifling way. "When I die, I expect that to end it with me."

"Because you expect it to be so, does not make it so," said Ralph.

"You expect to die as the dog dies, do you?" asked Bert.

"Just that way," replied Emmett.

"When a man expects to die as the dog dies, he usually lives as the dog lives," said Will Long.

"But we must all appear before the judgment bar of Christ, to give account of the deeds done in the body," said Bert.

By this time George had come up to the boys, and as he did so Bert said: "We have been having it with Emmett again."

"About what?"

"Oh, about religion."

"Yes; and they might as well talk to that old stump out there as to talk to me about religion. I am not concerned about religion."

"But you ought to be concerned about it," said Will. "We are concerned about you."

"Well, you need not be. I'll come out all right."

"You'll come out all right!" said George in astonishment. "How can you come out all right if you do not start in all right? There is no such a thing as coming out all right when you are starting in all wrong. There are many who think they are starting in all right who are starting in all wrong."

"Well, I am satisfied all right the way I am going."

"That may be so, too," said George. "The devil makes men satisfied with themselves. He deceives many and they do not know it. He is leading many around by the nose just as he pleases."

"Well, I enjoy it pretty well."

"It seems so. But the devil's paths are the brightest at the beginning of them, but they grow darker and darker toward the end of them. 'There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.' 'All the ways of man are right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the heart.' Vainly hoping that you will come out all right is a wilderness journey, without a cloud by day or a pillar by night to guide you; which, instead of bringing you into the promised land, may make you to perish in the terrible wilderness. Such a vain hope is like the mirage of the desert, the nearer you approach it the less real is the appearance of it."

"You are getting too eloquent for me," said Emmett, in derision.

"I am simply trying to tell you the truth plainly," said George.

Nothing was said for a moment, and then Bert Moore said, "Emmett, what are your objections to becoming a Christian?"

"Oh, they are too many to mention," indifferently replied Emmett.

"Well, tell us some of them," said Will Long.

"Well, I would have to give up too much."

"You will only have to give up what is wrong," said George.

"I know that," said Emmett; "but that is just what I do not want to do."

"Do you mean to say, Emmett, that in the face of what Christ has done to save you, and to redeem you from sin, that you are not willing to give up your sin?"

"I suppose that is it. Then there is too much required of a Christian, any way."

"Why, Emmett, there is nothing required of a Christian but what is right; and that is required of every one whether he is a Christian or not. Nowhere in the Bible can you show me where there is more required of a Christian than of a man who is not a Christian. When a man has become a Christian he has met the requirements; that is all. God does not require more of me as

a Christian than he does of you as a non-Christian. This is what he requires of me, 'To love the Lord my God with all my soul and with all my heart and with all my mind.' And that is what he requires of you, too. He requires of me to forsake my sin, to accept Jesus Christ as my Savior, and to follow Him as Lord and Master; and that is what he requires of you, too, and woe be to you if you do not meet those requirements."

"But if you are a Christian it would be wrong for you to do things which will not be wrong for me to do."

"No! no! If they are wrong for me to do, they are wrong for you. Because a wicked man does a wicked act does not make the act right. If you have a right to do wrong things, then I have a right to do them. God forbids me doing only that which is wrong; and that he also forbids you. I have the privilege to do everything that is right; no man has a privilege to do that which is wrong."

"But George, it would not be right for you, if you are a Christian, to drink, and gamble, and go to horse races and things like that, would it?"

"No! Neither is it right for you to do them."

"God can not hold me responsible for things for which he will hold you responsible for."

"You will not say that at the judgment day."

"Say what?"

“Why, you won’t get up at the judgment bar of God and say, ‘You can not hold me responsible for these things, for I was not a Christian.’ If you do, He will say to you, ‘But you ought to have been a Christian, and I will hold you responsible for all the evil a Christian ought not to have done, and for all the good that he ought to have done.’”

“Oh, well, boys, I guess it is all right to be a Christian, if one wants to be, but I haven’t time to be a Christian.”

“No time to be a Christian! No time to prepare for eternity! You ought to do first things first, and what is more important than the salvation of your soul? ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven.’ Perhaps at last you will say, as did the queen of whom I read the other day, who, when she came to die, cried out in despair, ‘Oh, for a moment of time that I might make my peace with my God!’ Or, like that rich old man who died some time ago, who said, at the last moment, ‘Alas! I have prepared during the course of my life for everything but death, and now I must meet my God wholly unprepared.’ I think, Emmett, when you come face to face with death that you will wish that you had taken time to prepare for eternity.”

“Oh, well! Perhaps some time I will be a Christian; but not now.”

“ Emmett, if you ever ought to be a Christian, you ought to be one right now. ‘He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.’ Every moment that you are refusing to live a Christian life you are committing a sin. Let’s see, if you are twenty-four years old, you have committed seven hundred and fifty-six million, eight hundred and sixty four thousand sins. Your sins are piling up very fast every day that you refuse to be a Christian.”

“ Oh, well, you say, ‘He can save the greatest of sinners, and he will save me at last.’ ”

“ Perhaps so, and perhaps not. He may say to you; ‘Because I have called, and ye have refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded it; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. Then shall ye call upon me, but I will not answer; ye shall seek me early, but ye shall not find me.’ ‘Seek ye the Lord while He may be found (and that implies that there may come a time when he can not be found); call ye upon Him while he is near (and that implies that there may come a time when He is not near).”

“ From that you don’t believe much in death-bed repentance, do you, George ?”

“ I believe in a death-bed scare, in a drowning

man grabbing for floating straws; but I do not believe much in death-bed repentance."

"But was not the thief on the cross saved at his death?"

"Yes; but the thief on the cross had not been plead with, and admonished, and warned, and besought as you have. The thief on the cross had not been brought up in a Christian community; taught in a Sunday school; nurtured in a Christian home; blest with Godly parents, as you have. The thief on the cross accepted Christ at the first possible opportunity; and if you would have done this, you would have been a Christian long ago. The thief on the cross had never been told of Christ before, but you have; he had never been urged to accept him before, but you have. I fear it will be more tolerable for the thief on the cross, on the day of judgment, than for you. He may say to you as He said to the cities which rejected Him, 'Woe unto Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida, for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, that were done in thee, they would have repented long ago in dust and ashes. Therefore I say unto you, that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you.'

"There is only one time for you to become a Christian, Emmett."

“ When is that ?”

“ Right now.”

“ I thought you would say that.”

“ That is the only thing that I can truthfully say. For ‘now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.’ ‘Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for ye know not what a day may bring forth.’ Emmett, you will never see to-morrow.”

“ Why, George, you don’t expect me to die to-night, do you ?”

“ No; but when you will wake up to-morrow, it will be to-day. Why will you not become a Christian right now ?”

“ Because I don’t want to.”

“ I don’t think, Emmett, that as you will stand before the judgment bar of God, you will find much consolation in the fact that you have rejected Christ all the days of your life, and trifled with His mercy, and spurned all His love.

“ Why do you want to put off this matter until your dying day ? Do you want to serve the devil all the days of your life, and then come at last like a coward and expect God to save you ? I have a good deal of respect for the old sailor, who, when he came to die, said to his friends, as they gathered about him to admonish him to accept Christ, ‘No; I know I have been a great sinner; I know I am going to hell; but I have too much manhood left to come now and throw the

fag end of my life in the face of the Almighty.' Is the service of the devil so precious that you must take all of this life in serving him?"

"I guess that is it," replied Emmett, in a trifling way.

"I can not imagine a meaner thought that could possess a human heart than that, Emmett. If there is anything like robbing God, you are doing it."

George's sudden thrust seemed to have balked Emmett for a moment, so that he was not able to reply to George. There was a deep silence, and then Bert Moore said, "I would not want to answer for Emmett's sins at the judgment day."

"Oh, my sins are few and small," said Emmett in a trifling manner.

"That may be," said George. "But one sin will condemn a man. You need not blow a thousand bullets through your brain to kill you; one will do it. You need not thrust a thousand daggers through your heart to kill you; one will do it. You need not take a hundred doses of poison to kill you; one will do it. As one wound may kill the body, so one sin will damn the soul. There was one leak in the vessel; it sunk it and drowned all on board. There was one cancer near the heart; and it killed the man. There was one speck of leprosy on the forehead; and the man became an outcast forever. There was one

spark in the magazine; and it blew it to atoms. There may be but one sin upon your soul; but if it is not forgiven you will be an outcast forever. For one sin Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden. For one sin Moses was shut out of the promised land. For one sin Gehazi became a leper as white as snow. For one sin angels were cast out of heaven down to hell. 'If we offend in one point we are guilty of all.' The Apostle Paul says, 'There is no difference, for all have sinned.' It does not matter whether your sins are many or not; you need not commit many sins to be lost—you are lost already; for 'he that believeth not on the Son of God is condemned already.'

"You will be held accountable for the sins of omission as well as the sins of commission. You will be judged not only for the evil that you have done, but also for the good that you might have done; not only for being abominable sinners, but also for being unprofitable servants; not only for what you have done against the Savior, but what you might have done for him. Think of the time you have wasted; the talents you have squandered; the opportunities you have misapproved. Think how you have blasphemed His name; how you have spurned his love; how you have disregarded His promises; how you have despised His mercy."

“ Oh, no doubt I am a sinner, but I am not responsible for being in sin.”

“ You may not be responsible for being in sin, but you surely are responsible for getting out of it. You may not be responsible for your original sinfulness, but you are responsible for your sinful diffidence. God will not hold us responsible for being under condemnation, but for not accepting His great gift of salvation. It will not do for you to say at the judgment day, ‘ Lord, I knew I was a sinner, but I could not help it.’ And he shall say, ‘ Did I not offer salvation and you would not take it?’ Noah might have said, ‘ I am not responsible for the flood and I will not get into the ark,’ but if he had not gotten into the ark he surely would have perished in the flood. Lot might have said, ‘ I am not responsible for Sodom’s calamity;’ but he was responsible for his own safety. If he had not gotten out of Sodom he surely would have perished in Sodom. Why should we complain about being under condemnation when there is a way of salvation? If you ever are lost it will not be because of God’s providence, but because of your negligence; not because you could not be saved, but because you would not be saved; not so much because of your sinfulness, as of your stubbornness.”

“ Well, if I am ever lost I am sure that it need be nothing to you.”

“But it will be something to me; for the scripture saith, ‘If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his sins; but his blood will I require at thy hands.’ For your own sake, and not for mine you ought to become a Christian. I know you are not ready, neither are you much concerned about becoming a Christian; but will you not consider the matter earnestly?”

“No, I will not. I can tell you right now, that you are wasting time in talking to me about becoming a Christian. I don’t care whether or not you ever speak to me again about becoming a Christian. What I want you to do is to leave me alone.”

“I can do that, Emmett, if you desire it; that does not matter much, but when the Spirit of God will leave you alone, it will be a sad thing. ‘His spirit will not always strive with you.’ He may say to you as he did to Ephraim, ‘He is joined to his idols, let him alone.’ I am afraid Emmett, that your trifling will lead to that unpardonable sin—the sin against the Holy Ghost, which will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.”

“I am sure that I do not know anything about that sin, and I do not bother myself about it. It may be I have committed that sin already; it does not matter, but I would like to know what it was.”

“ It is saying ‘ No ’ to God for the last time. It is when he shall knock at your heart for the last time. It is when you hear his voice and harden your heart. It is when God sees that there is no use in striving any longer and he leaves you alone. It is when God has given you up.”

“ I do not believe that God ever will give any one up. How can He if He is a God of love ?”

“ I believe the Spirit of God will strive with a human soul so long as there is any hope; I believe the Savior knocks at the door of a heart so long as there is any hope of them opening to Him; but when His striving will only make them harden their heart; when His rapping at the door will only make them bolt it more closely; then He leaves them alone. Why should He not? He would only be adding condemnation to them by keeping on striving and knocking, when it will only harden them more and more. And then what use is there in His knocking longer when He sees that they will not yield but will bolt the door more tightly ?”

“ I do not think there is a sin that God will not forgive. He would be a cruel God if He will not forgive every sin.”

“ He can't forgive it. How can He forgive you your sin, when you have become so hardened or indifferent or trivial that you will not forsake your sin? The sin against the Holy Ghost is not

a fault on God's part, it is a fault on your part; God will forgive every sin that is sincerely repented of, but the sin against the Holy Ghost is that you have become so hardened, or indifferent, or self-righteous that you will not repent of your sin. The sin against the Holy Ghost is not that God does not desire to forgive, but because He can not forgive; because you have hardened your heart against the Holy Spirit that would lead you to repentance; and seeing that there is no use to convict or plead, He leaves you alone."

"Well, I have not committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, because I do not think that He has striven with me, or that He has convicted me of sin."

"May be he knows that it will be of no use to strive with you or to convict you of sin. May be He knows that you will only harden your heart against His strivings, or will not repent of your sin when you are convicted of sin, and He does not want to add condemnation to you by convicting you of sin when He knows that you will not repent of it. Unwillingness to yield to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, to the strivings of the Holy Ghost, to the convictions of the Holy Ghost, is as much a sin against the Holy Ghost as to resist Him when He has striven with you. I am not surprised that the Lord lets some men go down to hell without ever even pleading or

striving with them, because He knows that it would do no good to strive with them."

"Well, if the Holy Spirit does not strive with me, and I am lost, then isn't God to blame?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Because the Holy Spirit has been standing ready these many days, and perhaps years, to convict you of sin, but you have shut your heart against Him, so that He could not convict you. And then, perhaps He knew that you would not yield to His promptings, and so He did not convict you."

"You seem to put the blame entirely on me."

"There is where it belongs."

"If a man is not willing to yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, what is he going to do?"

"Have you ever prayed that God might make you willing?"

"No!"

"Are you willing to kneel down here and pray that now?"

"No, I am not," said Emmett, defiantly.

"Well then, if ever you are lost, who is to blame?"

Emmett arose with an awful oath upon his lips; he walked away saying, "You can't scare me into heaven. If I go to hell, it's my lookout."

CHAPTER X.

Saturday morning came and George returned to the city. All the boys were sorry but Emmett; he seemed glad. After he left, the boys remained in camp one week longer. During this time not one word was spoken to Emmett about being a Christian. He told them not to speak one word to him and they took him at his word. Frank Basil, with whom George had an extended talk about religion, seemed to be more serious than usual, and frequently talked about religion, which annoyed Emmett very much.

George left the camp praying for Frank, for he seemed to have obtained the assurance that he would be converted, but when he went to pray for Emmett it seemed as if his prayers did not rise higher than his head.

When George left it seemed to have unsettled the camp. The life and sunshine was gone. The week which the boys were going to spend in the camp seemed very long. It became a task for the boys to stay. If they could have made arrangements to get back to town they would have gone immediately, but they could get no word back to have some one come after them.

Arrangements had been made for them to go back on Saturday, so they had to remain until then. It was a very long week, and when Saturday came they broke camp early in order that they might sooner get back to town.

Monday came and the boys were in their places of work as usual. Frank Basil, who was waiting to return to college, divided his time between George Axtell and Emmett Windom. Only a short time before he spent all his time with Emmett, but George seemed to have partially won him to himself while in camp. This distressed Emmett, for Frank had been a special friend of his, and he did not like to see him won away by "any of the converted folks."

During the week Will Long, Bert Moore and Ralph Hill had agreed to unite with the church on Sunday. On that day Frank was at services, something very unusual for him. The reception of the boys impressed him very much. He almost wished that he were with them, but he consoled himself for not being by saying, "I can not because of my peculiar notions, or 'honest doubts,'" as he called them. The boys became very active in church work. They, together with George, became the life of the church.

In September Frank returned to college. The words which George had spoken to him and the

influence which he had over him remained with him. It seemed as if the spirit of God was constantly striving with him, but he fought it all down. He had been very skeptical, and was, even now. He tried to believe the Bible was a foolish tale; that heaven was a fairy land; that hell was a scare-crow. But he found no comfort in these vain and foolish notions. Every now and then there seemed to say to him a still small voice, "But what if the Bible is no idle tale; what if heaven is not a fairy land; and what if hell is a reality?"

Strong convictions of the Christian life struggled in his soul, but these he kept down. He had gone along in college quietly, but all the while he was an inquirer. He said nothing to any one; no one said anything to him. The young men who were closely associated with him noticed that he was more serious than he had been the year before. He paraded his skeptical notions about less than usual. They knew not that at times there were in his breast convictions that were almost equal to spiritual convulsions.

The time for the week of prayer in colleges had come; it was observed by the Young Men's Christian Association. In an upper room of the building, called the "dorm," there met daily a band of young men who prayed for special students of the college. Frank Basil was one of

them. For several days they had prayed earnestly for him and a number of others in whom they were especially interested, but those for whom they were praying did not know it. They had chosen those for prayer who they thought were having a bad influence among the students of the college. They chose Frank because of his infidelity.

His conviction grew day by day; they fastened themselves upon him more firmly than ever. At times it seemed to him that he would have to yield to his convictions; but no one spoke to him, and they, for a time, subsided.

But he came to the crisis of his life. One of two things had to be done; he either had to yield to his convictions, or stamp them out of his life forever. He studied very little, save over the question of his soul's salvation.

It was on Thursday. He left the class room very much depressed in spirit. That evening he could not study; that night he could not sleep; he tossed to and fro, worrying over—well, he scarcely knew what, save that he wondered whether the Bible was right, and he was wrong. This thought crowded out of his mind all other thoughts. He paced the floor, waiting for the day. The morning came, but it brought no rest for his troubled soul. He seldom went to chapel, but this morning finding no rest in his room,

and being almost like a caged tiger, he decided to go.

On his way to the college he was overtaken by Omer Little, one of the most active young men in Christian work in the college. He talked to Frank, as usual; but he noticed that he was not much inclined to talk, as he usually was. He walked along for a distance, neither one saying anything to the other. Finally Omer said, "Frank, what is the matter? You seem very sober this morning."

"I don't know, I am sure," said Frank. "I spent the most miserable night last night I have ever spent. I did not sleep a wink. I never put in such a night in all my days."

"Why, what was the matter?"

"Well, to be frank, I am troubled over some religious questions. It seems as if the Lord was having a controversy with me. I am terribly convicted of sin. I felt myself doomed to all eternity. All my sins seemed to come up before me and they seemed to frighten me. If there is any way out of this difficulty, I am sure I would like to find it. These several days past have been a very hell on earth to me. Something will have to be done—I can't stand this thing very much longer."

"I am glad to hear it, Frank."

"Glad to hear it? What do you mean?"

"Why, I am glad to know that you are terribly convicted of your sin. I am glad the Lord is showing you your heart. We have been praying daily for you in our prayer-meeting in the 'dorm' that God might show you the error of your way, that you might turn to Him; for we felt that you were having a bad influence over the boys on account of your infidelity. I am glad the Lord has answered our prayer."

"Well, He must have heard it, for something more than human has had hold of me for several days."

"You might just as well yield to your convictions, and give your heart to the Lord, for if the Holy Spirit is striving with you, you will find no rest until you do yield, or grieve Him; and you do not want to do that."

"I am sure, Omer, I am willing to do almost anything to be right, if I am wrong."

"I will tell you what you do. Come up to our prayer meeting at noon. I think you will enjoy it, and the boys will be glad to see you; and perhaps we can help you."

"I have never been to a prayer meeting in my life; but I am willing to go almost anywhere, or do almost anything, if I knew that it would help me to settle this question."

"Well, you go up with me, and I am sure we can help you."

Frank thanked him for the invitation, and promised that he would go with him.

The noon hour came and the band of praying fellows were all there with the exception of Omer Little. It seemed very strange that he was not there, for he never missed; and he usually was the first one present. They waited a moment, then they heard him coming up the stairs, and some one with him. When he entered the room, to their great surprise Frank Basil stepped in with him. They could not understand it. They looked at one another as if their faces were an interrogation point. They knew not the meaning of Frank's presence.

They went on with their meeting; praying for the fellows on the list as usual, with the exception of Frank Basil. They were afraid of offending him by praying for him in his presence. When Omer led in prayer, he prayed very earnestly for Frank; he seemed to think of no one else. When they arose from their knees, Frank seemed very much moved; it was the first time he had ever shed tears over his lost condition. By this time the boys began to realize that something more than usual was the matter with Frank.

They dismissed the meeting; but Omer Little and Ernest White, who were the most successful in dealing with inquirers, remained behind with

him. There was no trouble in having Frank stay for a talk, for by this time he was so thoroughly under conviction, that he was willing to do anything to obtain help.

Ernest White said to Frank, "I am sure that we are willing and very glad to do anything we can to help you. If you want to be a Christian, there is no reason why you can not be. The Lord is willing, if you are, Frank."

"I am willing to do anything to be right with God, and to be at peace with Him," said Frank.

"Well, the Lord has already done His part that you may be at peace. He has provided a ground for peace and pardon, but you must do your part; you must by faith accept what he has done, that you may be reconciled to Him."

"Will you not accept Christ, and be saved at once?"

"That is what I want to be," said Frank, wiping the tears from his eyes, and composing himself.

Ernest took the Bible, without which he was seldom seen, and rapidly showed Frank the promises of salvation; and then urged him at once to step right out upon them and forever stand there.

Frank hesitated a moment, and then said, "I am afraid I can not do it just now; I would rather think over it a little."

Ernest took his Bible and a piece of paper and a pencil and noted some of the promises for salvation, and asked Frank whether he would not take them home and look them up, and see whether he could not take his stand upon them.

"I will if I can," said Frank.

"You need not be afraid," said Ernest. "The promises of the Lord are yea and amen in Christ Jesus."

Frank went home to his room; and then he thought, "How can I look up these passages when I have no Bible?" He decided at once to go down town and purchase one. When he went into the book store a number of the students were standing around, and when they saw him purchase the Bible they tried to "guy" him; but he seemed serious, and paid little attention to them. He went back to his room, and began to hunt for the promises. It was a difficult task for him, for he did not know the location of the books, whether they were in the Old or the New Testament. But finally, with much difficulty, one after the other, he found them. He pondered over them, he prayed over them; he desired that he might accept them. But it seemed that the devil—that old adversary of souls—was trying to deceive him by saying to him, "How do you know that those promises are true?" It came to an issue with Frank; he said to himself,

"Who shall I believe, this Word or Satan, my own foolish notions or the Word of God?" His own foolish notions gave him no comfort now; for he thought, "What if they are wrong? I may be mistaken."

He fell down upon his knees and prayed, "Oh, God! I am faithless, I am undone, I am lost. There seems to be no hope, but if there is, show it to me. Help me to take Thee at Thy word."

He waited a moment; then he arose and said, "I will stand upon the promises of God and be satisfied." He did it. Immediately there came into his soul such an assurance of salvation, and such a sense of peace that it almost overcame him. When he had recovered himself, he was so happy that he could not keep it. Straightway he went to Omer's room and told him what had happened; from there they both went to Ernest's room and they all rejoiced together.

Frank never did anything half way. He could not be a half-hearted Christian; and when he entered upon the Christian life, he entered upon it with all his might. The next day he went to the noon prayer meeting, where he joined the other boys in praying for the unsaved students in college. The conversion of Frank encouraged the other boys to continue in prayer. In less than a week a revival broke out in the college. The

fire started in the little room in the "dorm," but it soon spread throughout the entire college. Special meetings were begun and many of the students were saved. One night Frank with a number of other students pledged himself to the Lord's work, to go if need be into a heathen land, to preach the gospel there.

Soon after his conversion he wrote George Axtell a letter. He told him of his conversion, and his great joy and peace. He told him how his talk while in camp put him to thinking, and how dissatisfied he became with himself. "But now," said he, "I find great satisfaction in Christ, my Savior. He is my 'All in all.'"

He told him how he had dedicated himself to the service of the Master; to go if need be to the ends of the earth, to tell of the Love of God. He seemed to be unable to express his great gratitude to George for the interest he had manifested in him, and for the words he had spoken to him, which unsettled him and landed him in Christ.

George was overcome by the good news. He also yearned that he might some time devote his entire time to the service of the Master, for the winning of precious souls to Christ.

On Thanksgiving, Emmett Windom, with a number of other young men, went hunting. He overheated himself and contracted a fatal cold.

He was taken down with a severe case of typhoid fever. He grew worse and worse, and for two weeks his case seemed critical; but now it was hopeless. For a week his life hung in the balance, so critically poised that it was difficult to tell which way he was going.

George and the other boys were much concerned about him. George called upon him, but he said nothing to him about religion, for Emmett had told him never to say a word to him again about religion. He took him at his word, and left him alone. George told Emmett that he had received a letter from Frank, and that he had been converted, and had decided to enter the ministry. Emmett expressed great surprise at this; but said nothing more. George felt that this would have been a good opportunity to have said something to Emmett about his eternal welfare, and down in his heart he yearned to say something; but Emmett had bade him never to speak to him, so he choked down the words that seemed to be crowding to the end of his tongue, and said nothing.

George saw that Emmett was restless, so he turned the conversation, by saying, "Frank will be home next week."

"I will be glad to see him," said Emmett, in a low tone of voice.

"So will I," replied George.

George saw that he was worried and restless, so he concluded that he had better leave. He bade him good-bye and left, entertaining grave doubts as to whether he would ever see him alive again.

His condition grew worse every hour. The doctor forbade any one seeing him. At times he was delirious. Death seemed to be inevitable. In his conscious moments, he seemed to have streaks of concern; then again he seemed to harden himself against the thought of dying.

On Wednesday Frank returned from college. George met him at the train. When he stepped from the train, George said: "How are you, Frank."

"I never was better," said Frank.

Frank noticed that George seemed rather sober, and, supposing the reason, he asked, "How is Emmett?"

"He is just about at the end," said George. "They do not think that he will live more than a day or so."

"I must see him before he dies."

"I am afraid that you will not get to do so, for the doctor has forbidden any one to see him."

"But George, I must see him. I can not bear to think of him dying without seeing him."

"I am afraid that he will not live over night; and if he does, his condition will be such that it will be impossible to see him."

"But, oh, Frank, I must see him. Let us go over to-night and see whether we can not get to see him."

"Well, we can go over, but I do not think that they will give consent to let you see him, for the doctor has given very strict orders about letting any one see him."

"Well, let us go over and see, anyway."

"All right," said George, "if you think it best."

After tea the boys went over to see Emmett, but he was very much worse and they could not let them in. But Emmett's mother requested them to come back the next day, and if possible they might see him.

During the night he became more composed, but he was continually growing weaker and weaker. When Emmett learned that Frank had been there the night before, he seemed very much disappointed that he did not get to see him, and expressed a desire to see him. Frank was sent for; directly he came. He went into the room where Emmett was; he shook hands with him and talked with him a moment. He could scarcely talk above a whisper, he seemed so weak. Frank did not think it advisable to say anything to him about his salvation, though it was on this account why he was so anxious to see him; he could not think of him dying without

a Savior. He prayed silently what was best to do. Nothing could be heard but the deep breathing of Emmett. He motioned for Frank to put his ears down to his lips, and then in a broken whisper he said, "Frank, I am glad that you have become a Christian, and that you are happy."

"Yes!" said Frank. "But it breaks my heart to think that you are not converted."

"I guess there is no hope for me," said Emmett despairingly.

"Why not?" asked Frank.

"I have trifled too long. My heart is as hard as a rock. I have no concern for my soul. I know there must be something in religion, else you would not be a Christian; but it is all a mockery to me. If religion is true, then I am lost. But it is too late now."

"No! No!" said Frank. "There is hope for you, even now, if you will but turn to God and give him your heart."

"There is no hope for me. Once I could have been saved, but I would not; now I would, but I can not."

"Can you not say, 'Here, Lord, I give myself to thee, 'tis all that I can do.'"

"Yes, I could say that," said Emmett in a troubled tone, "but what's the use, when it all seems like mockery to me?"

"Are you not afraid to die without a Savior, Emmett?"

"I guess I am doomed. I feel that I am damned; but my heart is a stone. It seems as if God was mocking me."

Frank knew not what to do, so he said to Emmett, "Shall I pray for you?"

"You can if you want to, but it will do no good."

Frank knelt down and began to pray. He had prayed but a short time when Dr. Monroe stepped into the room, and saw that Emmett was very much excited. Frank arose from his knees and stood at the foot of the bed with the tears rolling down over his cheeks. The doctor was one of those rough fellows who had no respect for the feelings of any one, and especially religious feeling; and with an oath he said to Emmett's mother, "Did I not give instructions not to let any one in the room? How can you ever expect him to get well, unless directions are obeyed?"

Frank was overcome with grief, so he bade Emmett farewell and left. As Frank held him by the hand, he turned his face toward the wall and bit his lips to keep back the sobs. As Frank went away he said to himself, "I am afraid I will never see him again, either in time or eternity."

The next day he died in a delirious condition; but without God and without hope.

His death, and the manner of it, worried George Axtell and Frank Basil. George felt that he had done all that he could do for Emmett; but he was sorry and oppressed to think that he had not yielded to the word of God and been saved. Frank felt sad to think that he had not done what he might have done for his salvation. The thought that he might have been saved if he had been a Christian during the encampment, and tried to have influenced Emmett to be a Christian instead of encouraging him in his trifling, and bolstering him up in his foolishness, oppressed him. But it was too late now; the door of opportunity was closed against him forever, so far as influencing Emmett was concerned. He realized it, too. It heavily oppressed him. He thought, "Oh! Could I but recall one year, so that I might redeem the time which I have wasted, and improve the opportunities which I have misapproved. Oh, that I might have an opportunity to speak to Emmett, such as I had last summer!" But that summer never came, nor another like it. The past was sealed against Frank; but he determined that the future should not be wasted, as the past had been.

In closing, let me suggest one lesson to the trifling:

From this let us learn that it is a terrible thing to harden ourselves against the admonitions of the Word; for it will become a "savor of life unto life, or death unto death."

It is a terrible thing to say "No" to God, when He may take you at your word and seal it down forever against you.

It is a critical thing to grieve the Spirit of God, and send Him sorrowing away, never to return.

It is an awful thing to slam the door in the Savior's face, and turn him forever aside.

It is a foolish thing for a man to take this sword of the Spirit, and plunge it into his own soul, to his eternal undoing.

What a warning ought this instance of Emmett's be to every one who is inclined to trifle in the least with the salvation of his soul.

Learn, that if you say "No" to God he may take you at your word. That some "No" will be the fatal and the last one. That God by his Spirit will rap some time for the last time. That there is such a thing as "one more straw breaking the camel's back." That if you want to be left alone, He may leave you alone. That if you will not become a Christian when you can, the time may come when you have no will to become a Christian. Oh, unsaved one! "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." Isaiah lv: 6.

THE END.

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